

**Trans-corporeal bodybuilding: An exploration of the trans-corporeal relations between
South African competitive male bodybuilders and their more-than-human world(s).**

by

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ABSTRACT

The unique community of men's organised competitive bodybuilding has long displayed a peculiar humanocentrism his/torically ingrained by a subcultural reliance on patriarchal, Cartesian, and Western tropes which discursively encode competitive male bodybuilders as the prototypical Hu/Man(ist) subject: disembodied and disembedded from the materiality of their bodies and their more-than-human world(s). This humanocentric bias has itself been reproduced in the taken-for-granted ways academic work on competitive male bodybuilders often reinscribes exclusionary and hierarchal relations between male bodybuilders' subjectivities and their material bodies, as well as the more-than-human material agencies that are a necessity in the competitive building and gendered shaping of their muscle.

In addressing this gap, this study adopted a feminist-inflected posthumanist approach to explore how the material agencies of South African competitive male bodybuilders' muscle as well as their more-than-human world(s) co-participate in building their muscle, for the competitive stage. In doing so, the study drew on Stacy Alaimo's *trans-corporeality*: a radically relational (re)figuration of Hu/Man(ist) subjectivity and embodiment which (re)imagines the corporeal substance of "the human" as be(com)ing co-constituted through/with/across the material relations and forces of the more-than-human world.

In this regard, the methodological work of this study demanded an onto-epistemological shift towards a posthumanist and post-qualitative research-assemblage which set in motion a series of exploratory (re)search(ing) practices, as part of which 30 male bodybuilders from South Africa generated autophotographs about how they competitively build their muscle. From photo-encounter sessions a relational and multi-sensory mode of thinking↔sensing↔working with the participating bodybuilders and their autophotographic material (e)merged in ways which performatively co-produced a far more capacious analytic through/with/across which a multitude of human and more-than-human agencies could be

seen to intra-actively co-participate in the material↔discursive↔affective building and gendering of competitive male bodybuilders' muscle.

Ultimately, the study develops a new trans-corporeal mode of theorising competitive male bodybuilders, their muscle, and their muscle-building↔gendering practices which endeavours to more fully understand the more-than↔human relations which are always already at work in building and gendering the men and muscle at the gravitational centre of this peculiar subculture. In the world of men's competitive bodybuilding, the matter of muscle is never simply human.

DECLARATION

I, **Jarred H. Martin (MRTJAR004)**, hereby declare that the work on which this thesis is based on my original work (except where acknowledgements indicate otherwise) and that neither the whole work nor any part of it has been, is being, or is to be submitted for another degree in this or any other university. I authorise the University of Cape Town to reproduce for the purpose of research either the whole or any portion of the contents in any manner whatsoever, excluding the supplementary Photo Album to this dissertation which is subject to restrictions.

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DISCLAIMER

The author of this study specifically disclaims all responsibility for any liability, loss or risk, personal or otherwise, which is incurred as a consequence, directly or indirectly, of use of this thesis or any of the material in it.

DEDICATION

For:

HJM, MLM, & WJB.

Cor cordium.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A PhD, much like the muscle of a competitive bodybuilder, materialises in/of/as an entangled state of agencies which co-constitute, assemble, and become its being, shape, form, and size. Throughout the process of working through/with/across this study I have received guidance from many people, as well as support from many more-than-humans. This thesis is as much mine as it is theirs:

First, and foremost, to the **bodybuilders** who volunteered themselves to co-participate in this research. You guided me through the deeply personal experiences of your bodies. Many of you took the time to talk to me during demanding and frenetic periods of your competitive training. It is never ‘easy’ talking at length to a researcher – let alone when having been carb-depleted for weeks prior to a competition. For this I will always be grateful for your honesty, openness, and trust.

Second, to my academic supervisors:

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DF: It was during our second supervision meeting when you told me emphatically: “Jarred, you can’t put a microphone to muscle and make it talk!” I have carried those words with me since that day; they have forced me to think↔feel muscle, flesh, and matter in different and exciting ways. What I have come to conclude is that muscle may not talk if given a microphone, but, give it a dumbbell, and it will speak volumes. Thank you for the challenge.

RF, you got me interconnected and intertwined with many of my co-participants. You are a research champion in the truest sense of the word. You have my deepest appreciation for getting the ball rolling at junctures where I thought the research had stalled.

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PREFACE

In the vague primordial soup of theories, methods, procrastination, and anxiety that characterised the early conceptual days of this PhD thesis I embarked on a series of informal audio-recorded conversations with competitive bodybuilders to try begin making sense of what I wanted to do in/with/through this PhD. In one such conversation with Sipho¹, a twenty-three-year-old male bodybuilder who had been competing for just over three years, it became clear to me that the fleshy, sensuous, and sinewy mass he called his “physique” was not just crafted into existence by his desire to get bigger, harder, and leaner. When Sipho spoke of his encounter with a particularly tough set of bicep curls and a pair of recalcitrant dumbbells, I could not help but notice that there were other more-than-human agencies at work in his muscle-building. In the days that followed my conversation with Sipho I continued to feel the weight of the dumbbells he spoke of. Without realising it at the time, Sipho’s dumbbells had come to *matter* in ways that set in motion the iteratively entangled (re)thinking↔(re)reading↔(re)writing↔(re)searching which would ultimately culminate in the innumerable complex of more-than↔human relations that materialised this PhD. For this reason, and with Sipho’s consent, I found it fitting that part of our exchange preface this thesis:

Sipho: When I hit my last rep of bicep curls, I was fucked! Seven sets, twenty-six reps each, and now I was finishing off with a pair of 40kg dumbbells. I was wrecked. I won’t lie the pain of that last rep tore through me it was like that dumbbell wanted my arm it wanted to tear my fuckin’ arm off. But I was gonna fight it. When I started pulling it up I could feel it chowing me right here [[Uses his right hand to draw my gaze to the vertical midline serration separating the left and right bundles of his, now flexed and bulbous, left bicep]]. But you know what at that moment, I couldn’t help but smile!

Jarred: You smiled?

Sipho: Yeah I did, because I knew it meant I was growing.

¹ A pseudonym.

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² Please note that none of the participating bodybuilders’ autophotographs appear in this dissertation document. To safeguard the identities (and bodies) of the bodybuilders participating in this study a separate and supplementary autophotography album entitled “PhD Dissertation Photo Album” has been produced as a electronic/hardcopy companion that contains all the autophotographs listed above. The autophotography album is cross-referenced with this dissertation document and has been produced for the purpose of examination only.

LIST OF SOUTH AFRICAN SLANG TERMS

Listed below are a few South African terms and phrases which appear in the transcriptions of this study. With each term I have provided: the page number on which the term appears; an English translation for the term; and the South African language group to which the term typically belongs, in brackets.

Min [page 160]: Not keen or uninterested. (Afrikaans).

Okes [page 227]: Men [plural]. (English).

Chicks [page 234]: Women [plural]. (English).

“The flesh itself must be blasted, bombed and shaped, and the mass and power of built muscle confirms the body-builder in his ... own selfhood: I bulge, therefore I am.”

- Susan Benson observes how the fleshy formation of muscle is both the material nucleus and existential basis of bodybuilding, in *The Body, Health and Eating Disorders* (1997, p. 148).

CHAPTER 1: THE MATTER OF MUSCLE IN MEN'S COMPETITIVE BODYBUILDING

According to Murray Drummond (2007a), there has always existed a “historical nexus between muscularity, strength and masculinity” (p. 46). Given the centrality of muscle to the symbolic and material power of males/masculinity/men, particularly in “Western”³ patriarchally organised culture (Drummond, 2007b); it is not surprising that “male”⁴ bodybuilders have often been a recurrent point of interest for critically theorising the intersections of patriarchy, gender, masculinity/ies, and muscle. For Alan Klein (1993a), arguably one of the leading scholars who put the critical study of bodybuilding subculture on the academic map, the study of bodybuilding is a study of “men, not only because men constitute the vast majority of bodybuilders or because they control every power niche in the sport, but because muscles (and the building of them) are a standard that men feel compelled to strive for, rationalize, repudiate, or otherwise dismiss” (p. 6).

Muscle is the gravitational centre of the bodybuilding subculture, generally, and the competitive bodybuilding community, in particular (Dutton, 1995). And, since the start of critically informed social science studies of competitive bodybuilding, almost forty years ago; significant scholarly insights have been generated in regards to the meaning(s) of muscle for a subculture largely “dominated by men” (Ian, 2001, p. 84). For the most part, this literature has not only painted competitive bodybuilding as institutionally patriarchal and chauvinistic (Locks, 2012a), but, moreover, the men who inhabit this peculiar community as deeply vested in recuperating retrograde versions of masculinity and masculine identity, through their muscular development (Klein, 1993a). Yet, contrary to this popular picture, some more

³ Throughout this thesis I make reference to the “Western world”. While the homogenising signifier of “the West” is problematic; there remains an analytical value to identifying, as best I can, Western values, practices, and power, especially when working with people who are (historically) situated in the “Global South”.

⁴ My use of the term “male” throughout this thesis should not be seen as an endorsement of a biologically-based definition of sex or gender. Rather, I use it to highlight how the biologically-inflected language of sex organises gender through the competitive categories in which male and female bodybuilders participate.

recent studies with competitive male bodybuilders have shown that their muscle holds complex and shifting personal and subcultural significances which, in some instances, resist orthodox constructions of masculinity and masculine embodiment (Richardson, 2012; Underwood & Olson, 2018), and, in other instances, radically transgress the traditional two-sex system of embodying and performing gender (Richardson, 2004; Schippert, 2007).

Thus, rather than rehashing already existing scholarship which explores the ways in which male bodybuilders' muscle psychologically or socially intersects with, relates to, and signifies gender; this study takes as its focal point the materiality of competitive male bodybuilders' muscle, that is, the matter of muscle. In doing so, this study does not simply examine how male bodybuilders build and shape muscle, as if their muscle is nothing more than a passive mass of flesh awaiting their craftsmanship and, with this, subculturally circumscribed inscriptions of gender. Rather, this doctoral thesis explores how the material agencies of muscle co-participate in the practices through which muscle itself becomes built and, at the same time, gendered, for competition. To this effect, the male bodybuilder, as a human subject, is decentred as the locus of analytical attention in this study with the aim of exploring how Other(ed) non-human materialities also come to actively co-participate in the practices of competitively building *and* gendering muscle⁵.

In taking competitive male bodybuilders' muscle and their muscle-building↔gendering practices as the focal point for the theoretical and methodological work of this study, it is necessary to start by foregrounding some the difficulties inherent in conceptually defining and practically delimiting those men who specifically identify and compete as "competitive bodybuilders". As part of this discussion, I will outline the aesthetic-adjudicative criteria which has come to define men's competitive bodybuilding as

⁵ Throughout this thesis I will refer to bodybuilders' competitive muscle-building practices as building and, simultaneously, gendering muscle. To capture this in writing I employ the double-sided arrow to terminologically link "building↔gendering" together in an effort to reiterate how both the material building and gendering of muscle always co-entail and co-shape one another, and often in unexpected ways.

competitive and, once this is done, introduce the practices that typically constitute the competitive preparation of the male bodybuilder's body, generally, and muscle, specifically. Thereafter, I discuss the motivation for this study, the overarching aims of this study, the context in which this study and its participating bodybuilders are embedded, and, lastly, outline the structure of this thesis.

1.1. Men's competitive bodybuilding: A (competitively) contested terrain.

In one of the first scholarly efforts to develop a coherent history of modern-day bodybuilding, Kenneth Dutton and Ronald Laura (1989) observed that bodybuilding has often been bedevilled by a "problem of definition" (p. 27). With a subcultural genealogy which includes the vaudevillian musclemen of the latter 1800s (Erdman, 2004), physical culturalists at the turn of the 1900s (Waller, 2011), organised forms of competitive bodybuilding which developed after World War II (Fair, 2015), as well as the contemporary commercial pressures emerging from the mass-appeal and influence of exercise, gym-going, and weight training in the often indiscernibly overlapping and largely Western health, fitness, and body-image industries (Chaline, 2015); it is not surprising to find that men's bodybuilding has, "[f]or most of its hundred years of history, ... occupied a curiously uncertain zone lying somewhere between sporting activity, entertainment and erotic display" (Dutton, 1995, p. 260).

To this effect, it should be equally unsurprising that the term "bodybuilder" "has been used to define different groups of people, from those who compete in the sport of bodybuilding to those who are gym members or who compete in related sports" (Tod, Edwards, & Cranswick, 2016, p. 183). For the most part, however, academic literature on bodybuilding has tended to coalesce in defining the competitive male bodybuilder as one who "participates in body-building contests in which ... [he is] rated by a jury ... according to physique (proportions and harmony), muscle form, size and definition, and proper

presentation of his body in a posing routine” (Bednarek, 1985, p. 240). It is, in this regard, that the competitive male bodybuilder can then be distinguished from the non-competitive or recreational bodybuilder who develops their body and musculature for an end not primarily informed by the aesthetic-adjudicative demands of the competitive stage, such as, personal desire, occupational necessity, or subcultural affiliation⁶.

With that said, men’s competitive bodybuilding is not homogenous, but, rather, replete with different competitive organisations, competitive communities, and competitive castes (Klein, 1993a; Monaghan, 2001). An example of one of the foremost divisions in this regard is often between competitive bodybuilders who explicitly identify as so-called “natural” or “drug-free” (that is, steroid-free) bodybuilders, and those who do not. Yet, in both reality and practice, this distinction is often tenuous given the scepticism around natural bodybuilding and the degree to which its participants remain completely drug-free (Pro, 2014). Moreover, it could be argued, that regardless of whether a bodybuilder participates under the mantle of a bodybuilding organisation with the word “natural” in its name, most of the major bodybuilding organisations which dominate the competitive scene, including, the *International Federation of Bodybuilders & Fitness* (IFBB), the *National Amateur Bodybuilders Association* (NABBA), and the *World Amateur Body Building Association* (WABBA), have organisational rules which expressly forbid or, more often, caution against steroid use and, in some cases, subject their competitors to drug tests at competitive events⁷.

At the same time, it has become increasingly more difficult to identify the competitive bodybuilder over the past decade as organisations like the IFBB, NABBA, and WABBA have undergone significant diversification in expanding the range of competitive divisions available for male bodybuilders to compete in, such as, for example, “classic”, “physique”,

⁶ This, however, is not to say that these factors may not also inform the competitive bodybuilder’s muscular development.

⁷ The point being is that whether or not competitive bodybuilders declare themselves to be natural or non-steroid-using, the advances in steroid development and administration techniques often allow such substances to be used in ways which render them undetectable at the time of competition and testing.

and “fitness” bodybuilding, amongst others. While each of these competitive divisions for men are circumscribed by their own aesthetic norms and competitive standards characterised by less advanced development in muscular mass, size, and volume; there exists some debate amongst competitors and bodybuilding authorities as to whether the participants of these increasingly popular competitive divisions, which now often constitute the bulk of male competitors at bodybuilding events⁸, can still be referred to as “bodybuilders”.

Within the major competitive bodybuilding organisations there also exist different traditions of grading and awarding a bodybuilder’s level of competitive participation as well as their competitive achievements. Most notably, within the IFBB, competitive bodybuilders can be organised into two broad groups: (1) “professionals”, who are bodybuilders who have been awarded an IFBB “pro” card based on their competitive successes; and (2) “amateurs”, who are bodybuilders whose competitive endeavours have yet to meet the organisationally determined criteria which qualify them for a “pro” card. Although it is the amateur competitive bodybuilders who constitute the far majority of bodybuilders the world over; the “pro” bodybuilders are often considered the elite pinnacle of competitive bodybuilding and, in turn, occupy the subcultural epicentre of the competitive bodybuilding community.

Interestingly, there also exist inconsistencies in the ways the term “competitive” has itself been deployed in reference to contest-competing bodybuilders. For example, in some scholarly commentaries, the designation of “competitive” has sometimes been displaced in favour of other descriptive markers, such as, “elite” (Loland, 1999), “hardcore” (Denham, 2008), and “extreme” (Giraldi, 2009). Here, distinguishing the competitive from the non-competitive male bodybuilder becomes difficult because both often lay claim to these subcultural epithets.

⁸ The introduction of these competitive divisions within men’s bodybuilding has resulted in significant contestation within the bodybuilding fraternity. Recently, spats have played out on social media as well as other subcultural platforms where well-known male competitors participating in these newer divisions have publicly derided the extreme muscular aesthetics of male bodybuilders and, with this, the future mainstream viability of men’s bodybuilding when set against these newer divisions (Muscle Evolution, 2018).

Amongst competitive male bodybuilders, multiple and shifting ambivalences to the descriptive value of the label “bodybuilder” has also been evidenced, especially given the socially pejorative associations that have historically dogged bodybuilding (Bjørnstad, Kandal, & Anderssen, 2014). For example, in ethnographic work, Lee Monaghan (2001) found that some bodybuilders preferred “to be called ‘body-sculptors’ not ‘builders’ ” (p. 28, quotations original). Similarly, the identifier “competitive bodybuilder” is also often displaced within competitive bodybuilding parlance, media, and adjudicative argot in favour of the term “athlete” (IFBB, 2018; NABBA, 2018; WABBA, 2018).

The subcultural appropriation of the term “athlete” is intimately tied to the ways in which organised competitive bodybuilding has made numerous attempts since its inception, over six decades ago, “to gain mainstream sport acceptance in the athletic pantheon” (Klein, 1993a, p. 250) of both localised and international sporting authorities, in particular, the *International Olympic Committee* (Vallet, 2017). In this regard, it cannot be ignored that the word athlete is ideologically loaded with a taken-for-granted social capital that comes with participating in an officially recognised sport (Nicholson & Hoyer, 2008). It is this athletic legitimacy that competitive bodybuilding has often sought in an effort to neutralise some of the more socially risqué and physically risky competitive practices, such as, steroid use, that are entailed in competitive bodybuilding⁹ (Klein, 1993a). Yet, the bodybuilding contest is itself underpinned by a number of competitive norms which make the desire for the status of a more mainstream sporting code somewhat problematic.

A competitive bodybuilder “competes” against other competitive bodybuilders by standing on a stage and having their physical appearance evaluated, scored, and ranked by a

⁹ It should be noted that not all competitive bodybuilders regard themselves as athletes, nor do all desire competitive bodybuilding to be recognised as a sport. Many competitive bodybuilders actually regard their competitive body work and muscle-building as something more akin to craftsmanship and artistry (See Gaines & Butler, 1974). Some competitive bodybuilders also rhetorically construct themselves more as scientists than sportspeople (See Schwarzenegger & Hall, 1977), especially in light of the extensive physiological, nutritional, and exercise (and pharmacological) knowledges which often need to be developed and mastered, for the purpose of competitive participation.

panel of judges. While this may make competitive bodybuilding appear similar to, for example, gymnastics, figure skating, and diving, wherein “human observers or judges are necessary to evaluate” (Gaines, 2001, p. 41) the performance of the participant; unlike these sports, competitive bodybuilding does not entail the demonstrable evidence of biokinetic skill, athletic prowess, or even physical strength¹⁰, at the moment of competitive adjudication (Klein, 1993a). Rather, when on stage, the bodybuilder is required to perform a series of poses which manipulate and accentuate the visual and aesthetic appearance of their muscular development – bringing the bodybuilding contest much closer to a form of competitive pageantry for men¹¹ (Denham, 2008). Thus, it is here, when the competitive male bodybuilder parades their hard-earned muscular development under the harsh spotlights of the competitive stage, that the underlying subcultural character of men’s competitive bodybuilding is often revealed: it is, and always has been, a visual spectacle (Liokaftos, 2012).

In sum, for the purpose of this study, I consider the male bodybuilder to be defined as competitive by virtue of their participation (as an amateur or “pro”) in the contests or competitive events of a bodybuilding organisation and, to this effect, whose competitive bodybuilding practices are geared towards the development of a physique which approximate the aesthetic-adjudicative criteria of the bodybuilding organisation on whose competitive platform they compete. With that said, given the significant contestation around whether men participating in newer divisions, such as, “physique” and “fitness” bodybuilding are in fact subculturally classifiable as bodybuilders, at least in terms of the muscular aesthetics that have traditionally circumscribed “the look” of the male bodybuilder; this study specifically

¹⁰ I concede that some competitive bodybuilders, and scholars on bodybuilding, may disagree with this assertion. However, while I cannot dispute that bodybuilders develop some level of biokinetic skill, athletic prowess, or physical strength when embarking on the labour-intensive months and years of weight training that competitively oriented muscle-building requires; it is my contention that these capacities are not required to be functionally demonstrated or performed during competitive adjudication.

¹¹ In this regard, Underwood (2017) has cleverly suggested that it is probably more appropriate to refer to the competitive bodybuilder as an “aesthete” (p. 84), as opposed to an athlete.

focuses on those men who compete in competitive divisions which are explicitly demarcated as bodybuilding, namely, “men’s bodybuilding” and, to a lesser extent, “men’s classic bodybuilding”. Lastly, given that “non-natural” (that is, steroid-using) bodybuilders dominate the competitive community in both number and subcultural status; this study does not include those male bodybuilders who unequivocally identify and compete as “natural” bodybuilders.

1.1.1. Setting the stage: An introduction to the aesthetic-adjudicative criteria that competitively define and gender the bodies and muscle of male bodybuilders.

According to Lavalley and Balam (2010), men’s competitive bodybuilding “is a visual sport” (p. 308) in which its participants are required to craft a physique that is judged in terms of both organisationally determined and subculturally informed muscular aesthetics. With that said, there is no single, all-encompassing or uniform aesthetic that all male bodybuilders competitively build or conform to (Monaghan, 2001). Rather, the ways in which any male bodybuilder materially develops their own body into a competition-worthy physique is dependent not only on a range of personal considerations, including, their competitive ambitions, aesthetic predilections, physiological anthropometry, subcultural support, and economic means, but, also, on organisationally specific competitive criteria that circumscribe the division¹² and weight-class¹³ that a bodybuilder chooses to compete in.

In anthropometric and aesthetic terms, the competitive criteria which regulate men’s competitive bodybuilding both prescribe and proscribe the mass, shape, and appearance of those (biologically sexed) male bodies that qualify to participate on the men’s competitive stage. Thus, while the anthropometric criteria typically establish the sex, age and bodyweight limits which together demarcate different competitive divisions and, within those divisions,

¹² See Appendix A for an overview of different divisions for male and female bodybuilders competing in events organised by the South African affiliate of the IFBB, *Bodybuilding South Africa* (BBSA).

¹³ See Appendix B for a basic outline of the different weight-classes/categories that, at the time of this study, were available for competitive male bodybuilders in events organised by BBSA.

different weight-classes available for male bodybuilders to participate in; it is primarily the aesthetic criteria unique to each division and weight-class that underpin the adjudicative values, practices, and systems of men's competitive bodybuilding.

With that said, the aesthetic-adjudicative criteria of men's competitive bodybuilding are in no ways homogenous or universal, but, rather, organisationally and historically contingent. However, since the inception of men's organised competitive bodybuilding an overarching subcultural aesthetic has tended to ideologically scaffold the competitive ideal for the muscular development of male bodybuilders' bodies across different bodybuilding organisations, namely, the "X-frame" (Thorne & Embleton, 1997).

In the most general terms, the X-frame physique is a subculturally prized physique produced through a corporeal composite of: (1) broad muscular shoulders; (2) a large, well-developed back; (3) thick, muscularly defined arms; (4) compact and densely defined abdominals; (5) a tight and narrow waist; (6) flaring quadriceps; and (7) hard, "cut" calves¹⁴. Together, these body areas and, more specifically, the muscles and muscle groups which comprise each of these areas, materially contour an overall body shape against which competitive bodybuilding organisations have traditionally evaluated male bodybuilders' physiques (Kennedy, 2008). In materially building the X-frame physique, male bodybuilders must however also meet some important aesthetic criteria which regulate the adjudicative appraisal and competitive value of their muscular development¹⁵, primary of which include:

¹⁴ See Appendices C and D for basic diagrams of the front-and-back-facing views of a competitive male bodybuilder's major muscle groups.

¹⁵ In compiling these criteria, I reviewed academic literature on men's bodybuilding as well as documentation produced by a number of competitive bodybuilding organisations, including, the IFBB, NABBA, and WABBA. The criteria that I specifically mention here should not be seen as exhaustive, universal, or objective standards – largely because they are, according to Roundtree (2005), "the most unintentionally obscure and misunderstood area in competitive bodybuilding" (p. 21). The competitive adjudication of bodybuilders' physiques and muscle by bodybuilding judges is a highly subjective and often contentious affair. In fact, according to Gaines (2001), bodybuilding judges' visually-based assessments and rankings of bodybuilders' physiques are often subject to a range of personal preferences, including, "political affiliation, a judge's beliefs and attitude, the reputation of the athlete, the coach's reputation, and other biases" (p. 48).

1. *Definition.* This is the visibility of muscle striations in muscle tissue and the clarity of separation between the muscle groups of a bodybuilder's physique.
2. *Proportion.* This is the degree to which a bodybuilder has crafted an even spread of muscle mass across the physique ensuring that the muscular development and size of the upper half of the body (chest, abdominals, and arms) is balanced in relation to the muscular development and size of the lower half of the body (buttocks, thighs, and calves). The criteria of muscular proportion much like that of symmetry requires a bodybuilder to manipulate the overall size of their physique and individual muscle groups to approximate a subculturally favoured and gendered frame. It means that competitive bodybuilders cannot just develop muscle size without considering the gendered aesthetic appearance and shape of the muscle they are building.
3. *Symmetry.* This is the degree to which a bodybuilder displays a right-to-left symmetrical physique, whereby each side of the physique is a mirror of the definition, proportion, and muscularity of the other side.
4. *Vascularity.* This is the extent to which a bodybuilder has been able to diet down their overall body fat levels thereby displaying the visible network of subcutaneous arteries and veins which criss-cross their musculature. Visible vascularity directly contributes to an appearance of greater definition, or a "harder" and "drier" looking physique.
5. *Muscularity.* This is the look of "hardness", "fullness", and density established in the bodybuilder's muscles. The overall level of muscularity a bodybuilder displays is not only dependent on the long-term cultivation of muscle mass, size, and density through (years of) weight training, but, also, the "temporary manipulation of carbohydrates, water and ion balance" (Roundtree, 2005, p. 22) through their pre-contest diet.

However, more than just an aesthetic gold-standard, the X-frame physique also encodes a subculturally circumscribed visual frame of reference for the gendered development of both male (and female) bodybuilders' bodies, generally, and their muscle, more specifically. In this regard, it is worth noting that very rarely do the adjudicative criteria governing the aesthetic appearance of competitive male bodybuilders' bodies make pointed reference to gendered norms in the competitive development and presentation of their physiques. However, as feminist scholars studying the experiences of women in bodybuilding have observed, the explicit (re)inscription of a traditionally hetero-patriarchal and sexually dimorphic gender order within the subculture of competitive bodybuilding has typically been directed not at male competitors, but, rather, female bodybuilders and their muscular development¹⁶ (Aoki, 1999; Bolin, 1992; Brace-Govan, 2004; Felkar, 2012; Johnston, 1996; Lowe, 1998; McGrath & Chananie-Hill, 2009; Milanovich, 2012; Richardson, 2008; Roussel & Griffet, 2000; Roussel, Griffet, & Duret, 2003; St. Martin & Gavey, 1996). To this effect, Marcia Ian (2001) has noted that the aesthetic-adjudicative criteria governing women's competitive bodybuilding is often marked by "explicit rules requiring that female competitors be judged according to an (undefined) standard of "femininity" " (p. 74, quotations original). In doing so, competitive bodybuilding has tended to subculturally (re)install "the male body ... as the [often unnamed] norm ... for the sport" (Obel, 1996, p. 195).

It is, in this regard, that the aesthetic-adjudicative criteria of competitive bodybuilding has often worked to collapse and conflate bodybuilders' biological sex with culturally essentialised and stereotypical images of gender and gendered bodies as well as hetero-normative constructions of sexuality (Boyle, 2005); in effect, not only (re)producing two definitively binarised competitive categories of male(/masculine/men) and

¹⁶ A good example of this can be seen in the IFBB's (2017b) competitive rules for the "women's physique" division which officially replaced the "women's bodybuilding" division in 2012. In this rulebook, bodybuilding judges are encouraged to "compare muscle shape, density, and definition [of the female physique] while still bearing in mind the [female] competitor's overall balanced development and femininity" (IFBB, 2017b, p. 9).

female(/feminine/women) bodybuilders, but, also, (re)moulding the idealised subcultural features of the male(/masculine/men) and female(/feminine/women's) bodies permitted to compete and, moreover, succeed in their respective divisions (Monaghan, 2014).

With that said, it is important to acknowledge that the socially normative categorisations of male/masculine/man and female/feminine/woman often fail to fully capture the much wider, more nuanced, and contradictory spectra of gender(ed/ing) representations that underpin contemporary competitive bodybuilding (Schippert, 2007). Indeed, it cannot be denied that female bodybuilders' muscular development allows them to culturally co-opt the symbolically gendered and, in particular, historically masculine/ised power of muscle (Aoki, 1996; Coles, 1999). In doing so, female bodybuilders can be theorised as liberatory figures who, in fiercely and playfully "androgynous" ways, disrupt the regulatory gender order by championing women's physical strength and non-conformity to gendered appearance and body norms (Worthen & Baker, 2016). Similarly, as more massive, ultra-ripped, and "freakish" muscularities have become a more valued competitive aesthetic for male bodybuilders (Liokaftos, 2017); it has been suggested that the bodies that male bodybuilders now build are far more socially transgressive, subculturally niched, and Queer, than they are traditionally masculine (Richardson, 2004).

Yet, in the same breath, organised competitive bodybuilding has continued to remain anchored to a much broader "hegemonic system" (Shulze, 1997, p. 11) of Western and, in particular, Euro-American gender norms through the way successive iterations of competitive regulations and aesthetic standards have trans-generationally (re)inscribed and regularised gender-specific dimensions to the subculturally accepted practices through which the material mass, size, and shape of muscle is competitively: (1) developed, such as, in gendered steroid use patterns which discourage and curtail female bodybuilders' muscular development (Bolin, 1992); (2) presented, such as, in female competitors' (often mandated) hairstyling,

nail extensions, bedazzled bikini attire, high-heeled footwear, and breast implants which dramatise the female bodybuilder's femininity (Bunsell, 2013); and (3) judged, such as, through gendered poses and posing routines which, for female competitors, feminise and sexualise their physiques¹⁷ (Patton, 2001) and, for male bodybuilders, are premised on an overtly masculine and exaggerated theatrics of aggression and dominance¹⁸ (Boyle, 2003).

1.1.2. Man-made muscle: A primer to the practices which materially build and gender muscle for competitive male bodybuilders.

According to Niall Richardson (2012), much of the academic writing on bodybuilding has focussed on the “final product of bodybuilding: the competition level physique” (p. 21). However, the reality of modern-day competitive bodybuilding is that it entails months if not years of daily behind-the-scenes body work which painstakingly renders a competition-ready physique. For this reason, Adam Locks (2012a) has argued that “to appreciate bodybuilding properly ... requires a recognition that it is concerned with both practice and a product” (p. 3), that is, the competition-standard physique and the competitive practices which build it.

In order to cultivate the quantity and quality of flesh needed to competitively craft a muscular physique which embodies the subculturally desired aesthetic-adjudicative criteria, competitive bodybuilders must embark on a sustained programme of “conditioning” their body over successive months and years, often in the lead up to a competitive event (Darden, 2004; Hatfield, 1984; Kennedy, 2008; Pense, 2012). Conditioning, in the broadest sense, refers to all those competitively oriented and subculturally informed (but not always organisationally sanctioned) practices which a bodybuilder pursues in an effort to materially build and shape the kind of gendered bodily and muscular aesthetics required for, but not

¹⁷ For example, in BBSA, the competitive criteria for female physique bodybuilders' posing routines are encouraged to “be fluent and feminine, no bodybuilding poses are allowed” (2018d, p. 5).

¹⁸ See Appendix E for the compulsory poses of competitive male bodybuilders competing in BBSA.

always resulting in, competitive success. For the most part, the three forms of conditioning considered to not just be indispensable in the material and gendered preparation of a bodybuilder's competitive physique, but, also, fundamental to the subcultural construction of their competitive identity are: (1) weight training; (2) dieting; and (3) steroid use¹⁹.

The first of the primary conditioning practices for a competitive male bodybuilder is weight or resistance training and exercise (Smith, 2006). According to Slater and Phillips (2011): "[u]nlike other sports that use resistance exercise to complement sport-specific training ... bodybuilders use resistance training as a primary mode of training ... to induce skeletal muscle hypertrophy" (pp. 67-68). To this effect, the ultimate purpose of weight training in competitive bodybuilding is to stimulate an "increase in [the] diameter of existing muscle cells" (Kennedy, 2008, p. 126), making muscle fibres larger and stronger; a process known as muscle hypertrophy. In this regard, bodybuilders employ the tactic of progressive resistance training, that is, the incremental increase in the amount of weight and resistance placed on muscle tissue. Subsequently, with adequate resting of trained muscle tissue, the body initiates a tissue repair process based on protein synthesis which stimulates muscular hypertrophy. Weight training is, therefore, not a slapdash affair, but, rather, a complex (pseudo)scientific arrangement which incorporates the need for regular and strenuous weight training sessions coupled with daily periods of post-training rest which, together, facilitate the underlying cellular mechanisms of hypertrophy.

For the competitive bodybuilder, sustaining muscular hypertrophy is an ongoing project characterised by a consistent struggle to overcome muscle's physiological capacities

¹⁹ It is important to note that there are a vast range of competitive conditioning practices and subcultural rituals that are a necessary component to the preparation of a male bodybuilder's physique for a competitive event. Some not discussed here, include: shaving and waxing the body to depilate body hair and enhance the visibility of muscular definition; as well as the regular tanning, bronzing, and oiling of the skin to darken skin colour and produce an oiled-shine which enhances the visible appearance of muscularity. While these practices remain integral to the overall process of competitive conditioning, they are directed more towards the outward aesthetic enhancement of muscle. For the purpose of this introduction, the conditioning practices which I focus on here are those directly implicated in material growth and development of muscle itself.

to adapt to physical strain. In doing so, however, bodybuilders' weight training programmes are also typically designed to minimise the possibility of "over-training" and "plateau". Where, on one hand, over-training refers to an "over-taxing [of] the body's recuperative abilities and thus [the] potential for growth" (Monaghan, 2001, p. 51); on the other, plateau refers to a state where a competitive bodybuilder's hypertrophic growth begins to stagnate because their muscle tissue has adapted to the exercise routine and resistance load it is subjected to. For these reasons, bodybuilders have developed a plethora of training practices which, through their unique subcultural lore, encourage different methods of weight training in order to maximise unhindered muscle hypertrophy. In this regard, bodybuilders' workout sessions will often be programmatically organised into a series of different exercises and exercise routines each with their own "sets" (the desired number of multiple consecutive repetitions of an exercise) and "reps" (the single full movement of an exercise).

Similarly, the frequency of training sessions in a bodybuilder's competitive training programme is commonly organised along a "split-routine", namely, the practice of training different muscle groups on different days. This approach to training ensures the bodybuilder allows for all their major muscle groups to be adequately rested before they are retrained. At the same time, this technique encourages a "full body" approach to muscular development where all their major muscle groups are systematically targeted for (re)training so as to develop the symmetry and proportion characteristic of the idealised X-frame physique²⁰.

The second major form of competitive conditioning for male bodybuilders is dietary manipulation and nutritional supplementation. For competitive bodybuilders, the biology of exercise-induced muscle hypertrophy is unambiguous: muscle cannot just be haphazardly subjected to accumulative loads of physical stress; the stimulation and stressing of muscle

²⁰ Competitive bodybuilders' training programmes vary greatly and are usually designed with their own competitive goals in mind as well as the strengths and weak spots in the aesthetic appearance of their muscularity, their own level of experience and expertise, their individual body type, their belief in the perceived effectiveness of certain training techniques, and the amount of time to a particular contest.

tissue must be followed by a sufficient period of rest and supplemented with appropriate nutrition. In general terms, a high protein diet combined with low fat intake and strategically introduced amounts of carbohydrates form the *condicio sine qua* for building a competition-standard physique of lean muscle mass. Thus, at a macronutrient level, bodybuilders treat their consumption of high protein foods as the fuel for muscle growth (Monaghan, 2001).

According to Lambert, Frank, and Evans (2004), competitive bodybuilders aim to establish a positive protein balance within their body's metabolic rate. A competitive bodybuilder's dietary practices must therefore attempt to ensure that the rate at which their body synthesises protein remains greater than the rate of protein breakdown. This ensures that the physiological processes underlying their muscle growth remain largely "anabolic". In doing so, bodybuilders adopt a functionalist approach towards the organisation and consumption of food and nutrition (Monaghan, 2001). Meal planning and food intake therefore become an ascetic exercise in and of dietary discipline which is subculturally circumscribed by the instrumental and utilitarian evaluation of different macro-and-micro-nutrients which maximise muscle growth. To this effect, bodybuilders' competitive diets typically include catalogues of nutritional supplements which fuel muscle accretion, specifically, and overall physique development, generally (Brill & Keane, 1994).

For Monaghan (2001), bodybuilders develop and exchange a sophisticated "ethnonutritional knowledge" (p. 52) which informs the rigorous planning and scheduling of their meals and nutritional supplementation. Meals are regularly consumed to maintain optimal metabolism, such as, for example, five-to-six-times a day. Furthermore, meals are strictly portioned according to food groups and organised in terms of a bodybuilder's competitive programme, that is, with the intake of fats being more common during the muscle-building phase of competitive preparation and virtually absent during contest time. Each food item in every meal is calorie-counted and carefully prepared so as to eliminate any

added caloric and fat intake. In this regard, competitive bodybuilders develop an almost uncompromising approach towards the dietary details of foods they consume (Kennedy, 2008); an attitude mimetic to what has been dubbed “orthorexia nervosa” (Bratman & Knight, 2001): an obdurate selectiveness towards eating so-called “healthy” foods²¹.

Thus, unlike the non-competitive or recreational bodybuilder, the diet of the competitive bodybuilder typically tends to mirror their competitive calendar and is typically split into two phases broadly described as a “bulking” phase and a “cutting” phase. For Robert Kennedy (2008), the bulking phase covers that time period when a competitive bodybuilder “eat[s] everything in sight” (p. 162). However, it is more accurately described as a period where the bodybuilder concentrates on building muscle mass with less inflexible restrictions on carbohydrate and fat intake. To this effect, bulking usually occurs during the off-season when the competitive bodybuilder feels less pressure to maintain visible muscular definition. Following this, the cutting phase²² attempts to maintain the muscle mass accrued during off-season bulking while, simultaneously, eliminating bodyfat in the weeks running-up to a competitive event.

In order to achieve a competition-standard level of visible muscularity the elimination of bodyfat is paramount²³. To this effect, a competitive bodybuilder will actively diet down their overall level of bodyfat and, in particular, subcutaneous bodyfat, usually through an extreme depletion of fats, carbohydrates, and water. This helps to produce a visible trail of veins and noticeable “cuts” or fine-grain definition in the appearance of their muscle. In addition to this, a day or so before a specific contest a bodybuilder will likely begin “carbo-loading”, a technique in which the bodybuilder strategically reintroduces carbohydrates back into their carb-depleted body. If timed correctly, their carb-starved muscles sap-up the newly

²¹ This is not unusual considering the ideology of health and nutrition which permeates competitive bodybuilding and ramparts against accusations of steroid use and unhealthy eating habits (Monaghan, 2001).

²² Also referred to as the pre-contest diet.

²³ Today, male bodybuilders often aim for a competition-day bodyfat percentage of 2-4% (Kennedy, 2008).

introduced nutrients and soon thereafter typically begin to balloon in size, creating a “full-muscle” look which enhances the degree to which their physique appears ripped and hard, with veins and muscle striations which press forcefully against a taught and thinned skin. The resulting physique, although physiologically unsustainable for more than a few hours on the day of a competition, is what is then referred to as a “peaked physique”.

Lastly, the third major form of competitive conditioning is the use of “ergogenic”, or, performance-enhancing substances, namely, steroids²⁴. To the outside world, competitive bodybuilding has historically been constructed as “a demonised drug subculture” (Monaghan, 2001, p. 25); with the term “steroids” often thrown about as a ham-fisted and cautionary catch-all phrase for almost all the performance-enhancing substances considered to be used by competitive bodybuilders. With that said, this does not mean that competitive bodybuilders’ use of steroids is necessarily ill-informed or anarchistic. In fact, competitive bodybuilders develop an extensive ethnopharmaceutical knowledge base (Monaghan, 2001; Wright, Grogan, & Hunter, 2000, 2001). It is this knowledge, accompanied by subcultural lore as well as personal experience and experimentation, which ultimately guides each bodybuilder’s peculiar steroid use practices, or, “*pharmacopraxis*”²⁵ (Coquet, Ohl, & Roussel, 2016, p. 818, emphasis original).

Monaghan (2001) characterises bodybuilders as ethnopharmacologists, “[t]hat is, ‘lay’ people with a detailed subcultural understanding of the pharmacological properties of particular compounds, consisting of a taxonomy of different steroids, dosages, administration routes and complex cycling theory” (p. 95, quotations original). Although this

²⁴ Throughout bodybuilding literature, competitive male bodybuilders’ use of steroids has been varyingly characterised as “use” (Blouin & Goldfield, 1995), “misuse” (Gonzalez, McLachlan, & Keaney, 2001), and “abuse” (Chung, 2001). In this study I deliberately opt for the term “use” to describe competitive bodybuilders’ steroid-related practices because it bears a closer non-pejorative resemblance to their own characterisation of this competitive practice. See Monaghan (2001, pp. 3-4) for a more detailed expansion on this debate.

²⁵ Coquet, Ohl, and Roussel (2016) define pharmacopraxis “as the action of ingesting products, synthesised or ‘artificially’ assembled, produced by the chemical industry to enhance performance or for aesthetic purposes” (p. 830, quotations original).

ethnopharmacological knowledge varies from one bodybuilder to the next and is substantially influenced by a bodybuilder's ability to network with and gain knowledge from other (more experienced) bodybuilders; this knowledge is considered virtually indispensable to competitive one-upmanship and, ultimately, overall competitive success (Dutton, 1995).

In broad strokes, competitive bodybuilders' ergogenic supplementation (or doping) can be broken down into two different "classes" of substances: (1) anabolic-androgenic steroids (AASs); and (2) non-steroid physique/performance-enhancers (PPEs)²⁶. Firstly, of all the chemicals in a competitive bodybuilder's ergogenic arsenal, AASs are the most widely used (Smith & Perry, 1992a, 1992b). In simplest terms, AASs are "synthetic derivatives of testosterone" (Bahrke & Yesalis, 2004, p. 614); and primarily function to build muscle mass and enhance the smelting of bodyfat (Wright et al., 2000, 2001). Secondly, PPEs describe non-steroidal agents which are typically used by competitive bodybuilders because of the chemical effects they have on training enhancement and muscle recovery, as well as overall physique development²⁷. PPEs include ergogenic substances, such as, *clenbuterol*, *human growth hormone*, *ephedrine*, and diuretics, to name a few²⁸. AASs and PPEs can be further divided into so-called "orals" which usually appear in pill form and are administered orally; and "injectables" which usually appear in oil or water-based ampules and are administered with syringes either intra-muscularly or at specific injection sites, such as, the buttocks.

In maximising both the absorption and utilisation of AASs and PPEs by the body, competitive bodybuilders are typically required to engage the steroid use practices commonly

²⁶ The use of the term "physique/performance-enhancer" throughout this study is deliberate. It is often the case that PPEs offer competitive bodybuilders aesthetic *and* performance-related enhancements which are not only often indistinguishable from one another, but, moreover, mutually reinforce one another.

²⁷ In Appendix F I have compiled a glossary of the performance-enhancing substances whose use was mentioned by the bodybuilders participating this study. Not all of the substances listed in Appendix F ultimately feature in the final extracts of data and analysis presented in Chapters Five and Six.

²⁸ It can be argued that nutritional supplements fall within this class of ergogenics given that they are, in their own right, a form of physique/performance-enhancement (Staszal, 2009). However, for the purpose of this study, I consider nutritional supplements, such as, for example, protein shakes, appetite suppressant pills, and other fat-burning products, more closely aligned to bodybuilders' dietary practices.

referred to as “stacking” and “cycling”²⁹. Stacking is the process of composing different combinations of AASs and PPEs and administering them in order to exploit the intended chemical effects, or “synergism”, of each chemical in a particular stack. These stacks are then cycled according to a bodybuilder’s competitive needs and contest preparation. This often means that a competitive bodybuilder will spend a fixed number of weeks on their chosen stack(s) followed by a period off their stack(s). Cycling the constituting AASs and PPEs in this way serves to prevent their bodies from completely adapting to the chemically-induced physiological enhancements offered by each substance. At the same time, this minimises the onset of side effects which come with the prolonged use of particular AASs and PPEs.

For male bodybuilders, the multifaceted practices which co-constitute the competitive conditioning of their bodies for the competitive stage are in no ways gender-neutral, but, in actual fact, are performative practices of gendering or what I have come to refer to as “gender-building” muscle, that is, of materially building subculturally peculiar gendered and, in particular, masculine/ist aesthetics, such as, for example, strength and hardness, into the very materiality/ies of muscle. From the months of gruelling weight training which nurture the gradual growth in muscle tissue, to the spartan dieting and strict supplementation practices which physiologically feed muscle accretion, to the chemical catalogue of AASs and PPEs which ignite previously unimagined possibilities in the material size and volume of muscle; all these practices become rationalised, organised, and executed in intensely embodied ways both through and with an often uncompromising subcultural argot and praxis suffused with masculinist tropes of power, dominance, independence, control, perfection, and aggression (Ian, 2001; Klein, 1993a; Strong, 2003; Wiegers, 1998). In so doing, the gendered and aesthetic qualities of competitive male bodybuilders’ muscle become materially,

²⁹ Although non-competitive or recreational bodybuilders also use AASs and PPEs (Grace, Baker, & Davies, 2001), it is the strategically timed, planned, and competitive periodisation of AASs and PPEs that specifically distinguishes competitive bodybuilders’ use from their recreational counterparts.

discursively, and affectively forged through the muscle-building practices which (re)fashion their flesh.

1.2. So, what's all the fuss (and flesh) about competitive male bodybuilders, their muscle, and their muscle-building↔gendering practices? The motivation for this study.

In the opening paragraph of *The New Encyclopedia of Modern Bodybuilding*, Arnold Schwarzenegger, one of the foremost figures in the history of men's organised competitive bodybuilding, argued that bodybuilding was, at its subcultural heart, "a celebration of the human body" (Schwarzenegger & Dobbins, 1998, p. 3). Indeed, there is a sense of human-centred exceptionalism which permeates almost every dimension of organised bodybuilding in which the subculture's "promise of personal physical and emotional change" (Klein, 1985b, p. 75) through muscular development, anchors the entire project of competitively (re)building and (re)shaping the body in an all-consuming and often ongoing self-centred search of "human perfectibility" (Dutton, 1995, p. 9).

The human-centredness of organised competitive bodybuilding is, however, also reinforced and reproduced through intensely gendered/ing tropes which coerce the male bodybuilder, through their subcultural development and enmeshment within the community, into sieving the construction of their competitive subjectivity through a Cartesian split: bifurcating their mind and their body (Fussell, 1991). Through this Cartesian cullender the male bodybuilder's mind becomes subculturally conceived as the authoritarian seat of his willpower, determination, and self-control (Bjørnstad, Kandal, & Anderssen, 2014): those subculturally vaunted ingredients for competitive success. To this effect, the male bodybuilder's body, which is, at first, a subculturally amorphous and materially chaotic mass of flesh, is then materially carved and gendered by means of gruelling weight training, ascetic dieting and nutritional supplementation, as well as the use of AASs and PPEs, into a

muscularly-defined physique, which can then be evaluated and categorised through the aesthetic-adjudicative criteria of their competitive division.

In this regard, the male bodybuilder's subculturally accepted programme of competitive norms and practices come to function, in both material and discursive ways, as Foucauldian-style disciplinary technologies of the body (Tagg, 1988); the bodybuilder's body is rendered into a malleable object which is (Saltman, 2003): (1) comprised of discrete isolatable parts which require their own unique mode of competitive preparation; and (2) composed of distinct material organicities, such as, muscle, fat tissue, and water, which in their own way must also be competitively managed and moulded. To this effect, the competitive practices which regulate the male bodybuilder's body into an appropriately built body and an appropriately gendered body for competition also double as subculturally peculiar processes of subjection through which the bodybuilder's subjectivity and body are forged through the normative values of men's competitive bodybuilding.

In doing so, the competitive male bodybuilder must come to think, experience, and treat their body as an individuated and autonomous object whose materiality/ies must be dominated (White & Gillett, 1994), even at the risk of his own physical and emotional health. The Cartesian objectification of the bodybuilder's body is, however, also suffused with a distinctly masculinist desire to exert a kind of all-encompassing "control over the flesh" (Parasecoli, 2005, p. 35); whether that is in crafting its recalcitrant materiality through toilsome weight training, or in denying the carnal desire of appetite through severe dieting. Muscle-building, for the competitive male bodybuilder, becomes tantamount to a deeply moralistic endeavour informed by much longer standing Western, patriarchal, and colonial inflections to achieve dominion over and, ultimately, transcend, the overlapping territories of "the natural", "the material", and "the body" (Grosz, 1994). It is then, through this

competitive journey, that the male bodybuilder's body of hard built muscle not only stands as a testament to their suffering and sacrifice, but, moreover, a monument to their dominance.

Yet, with that said, the interlocking tropes of dominance, detachment, and disconnection also extend beyond the materiality/ies of the bodybuilder's body through the mastery which all bodybuilders are expected to develop and exercise over the weights, foods and nutrients, as well as xenobiotic chemicals, which are vital components to modern-day competitive participation and success. However, despite their competitive importance, the significance of these non-human things and substances become circumscribed by their competitive value to the human bodybuilder (Klein, 1993a): weights must be lifted; food must be consumed; and steroids must be ingested and injected. All become regarded as passive matter and material in the instrumental service of building and, at the same time, gendering muscle, for competition.

It is, in this regard, that the motivation for this study emerges out of what I consider to be the theoretical and methodological limits within critical social science literature on the men and men's bodies that inhabit and dominate the world competitive bodybuilding when the male bodybuilder's human exceptionalism is taken for granted. What I propose, is that when the competitive male bodybuilder is unquestioningly placed at the centre of analytical attention, there is a kind of hierarchical exceptionalism which subtly reinscribes his human subjectivity and, in so doing, analytically delimits any form or force of agency to within the material outlines of his human body or, more specifically, within the Cartesian confines of his mind. In this regard, I contend that the kind of humanocentric bias which has analytically underwritten much of the existing critical social science on male bodybuilders, their muscle, and their muscle-building↔gendering practices, erases the dynamic ways in which the material agencies of muscle itself, as well as all Other(ed) non-human matter, participates in materialising and gendering the competitive male bodybuilder's muscle.

1.3. Trans-corporeal bodybuilding: The aim of this study.

This study explores how the muscle-building practices performed by 30 competitive male bodybuilders from South Africa entail the active co-participation of their more-than-human³⁰ world(s), particularly in ways which materialise and gender their muscle. In doing so, this study contests a humanocentric bias which recurrently appears in studies of the men and men's bodies which participate in and dominate the world of competitive bodybuilding.

The subcultural community of men's organised competitive bodybuilding has long displayed a humanocentric bias most evident in its historical reliance on patriarchal, Cartesian, and Western tropes to encode competitive male bodybuilders as the prototypical "neoliberal citizen: able, autonomous, in control, independent and rational" (Goodly & Runswick-Cole, 2013, p. 142), that is, the quintessential "Hu/Man(ist)"³¹ subject. This humanocentric bias has itself been reproduced in the taken-for-granted ways academic

³⁰ My use of the phrase "more-than-human" broadly refers "to all that exceeds the human, including non-human matter, relations, meanings and understandings" (Nxumalo, 2012, p. 298). My aim in using this specific terminological convention is to draw attention to all those material objects (such as, artefacts, machines, foodstuffs, (bio)technologies, chemicals, and minerals), organisms (such as, animals, plants, and microbes), and forces (such as, sensory, spatial, temporal, geographic, and historical) that have traditionally been ontologically defined "outside" of and, therefore, lesser than, "the human", within Western humanocentric thought. While the use of the phrase in this way originally appeared in ecology philosopher David Abrams's (1996) *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language In a More-Than-Human World*; it has recently received increasing empirical traction and development within the broad trans-disciplinary base of contemporary posthumanist scholarship, including: affect studies (Wright, 2014); actor network theory (Pyhtinen, 2016; Nimmo, 2011); critical animal studies (Alloun, 2015); nonrepresentationalist and posthumanist geographies (Braun, 2005; Lorimer, 2010; Panelli, 2010; Whatmore, 2006); critical studies of childhood education and pedagogy (Rautio & Jokinen, 2015; Taylor, Pacinini-Ketchabaw, & Blaise, 2012); critical body studies (Manning, 2013); environmental and eco-justice feminisms (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2009); as well as post-qualitative methodology (Fullagar, 2017). My preference for the use of "more-than-human" over the more common and longstanding "non-human" is based on what I consider to be the potential of the former term in disrupting the subtle and often pernicious "[re]prioritizing of the 'human', against whom there is 'non-' " (Bourke, 2011, p. 13, quotations original) when using a conceptual vocabulary that reifies the human/non-human binary. With that said, there are times throughout this thesis where I deliberately use the term "non-human" to emphasise how patriarchal, Cartesian, and Western humanocentrism have worked in devaluing and marginalising the other-than-human.

³¹ My use of the term "Hu/Man(ist)" (with a capitalised "H") seeks to not only emphasise the dominance of the human within the human/non-human binary, but, at the same time, draws specific attention to the operation of Western phallogocentrism which typically circumscribes "the human" in singular, universal, and normative terms as a male/masculine subject, that is, "Man" (Lenz Taguchi, Palmer, & Gustafsson, 2016). The "(ist)" component of this term recognises the philosophical influence of humanist, anthropocentric, and Eurocentric values in privileging the Hu/Man above lesser/non-human Others. The Hu/Man(ist) subject of patriarchal, Cartesian, and Western culture is therefore one who is typically represented as White, able-bodied, and heterosexual. My use of the term "human" (lowercase "h") indicates a more general reference to members of the species *Homo sapiens*.

analyses of bodybuilding often reinstall male bodybuilders at the agentic centre of their muscle-building practices. It has, therefore, not been uncommon to see critical (and not-so-critical) studies of male bodybuilders not only analytically bypass, but, furthermore, pacify, the fleshy materialities of their muscle (Moore, 1997); while, at the same time, reinscribing exclusionary boundaries and hierarchal relations between their corporeal bodies and the material world(s) of substances, tools, spaces, and times, that are a necessity in the material building and gendered shaping of their muscle.

In challenging this humanocentric bias, this study pursues a feminist posthumanist mode of theorising which resists “traditional humanist ways of thinking about the autonomous, self-willed individual agent in order to treat the human itself as an assemblage, co-evolving with other forms of life, enmeshed with the environment and technology” (Nayar, 2014, p. 4). It is my contention that a such perspective offers this study a new opportunity to engage competitive male bodybuilders’ muscle-building↔gendering practices as “a ‘not-human-alone’ activity” (Bodén, 2016, p. 1, quotations original). In crafting the *more capacious* analytic required to support this endeavour I introduce and develop Stacy Alaimo’s (2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2018a, 2018b) work on *trans-corporeality* to guide the theoretical and methodological work of this study.

According to Alaimo (2018b), trans-corporeality radically trans-forms/mogrifies the “master subject of Western humanist individualism, who imagines himself as transcendent, disembodied, and removed” (pp. 435-436) from the materialities of their body and their more-than-human world(s). Alaimo argues that, as an analytical tool, trans-corporeality imagines a “human corporeality [which] opens out onto the more-than-human world” (2008, pp. 255-256) and, in turn, recognises the “material interconnections of human corporeality with the more-than-human world” (2010a, p. 2). A trans-corporeal subject is, therefore,

unlike the “autonomous, mind-centred and disembodied subject” (Widegren, 2016, p. 89) of humanocentric thought, but, rather, an embodied and material subject whose “corporeal bounds” (Alaimo, 2008, p. 244) are *always already* actively be(com)ing transgressed/figured/fused through/with/across³² the materialities of their more-than-human world.

For Alaimo (2009a), the more-than-human world is not merely a collective of all a/in/un/non/not/sub/pre/dis/less/proto/infra/quasi/extra/other-than/-human³³ “things” which have been historically drained of agency and aggregated as a “blank, passive, resource for active human subjects” (p. 11). Alaimo’s (2010a) more-than-human world is a dynamic and “emergent place of entangled[/ing] material agencies” (p. 115). For this study, trans-corporeality not only decentres the Hu/Man subject as the analytical locus of attention, but, moreover, attunes this analysis to tracing how the materialities of male bodybuilders’ muscle and their more-than-human world(s) participate in materialising and gendering the fleshy formation of muscle, in particular through their competitive muscle-building practices.

Thus, in retheorising competitive male bodybuilders and the materialities of their muscle *as* trans-corporeal, this study turns to their competitive muscle-building practices with the primary aim of exploring how these practices produce, and are themselves produced through, trans-corporeal relations with their more-than-human world(s) whose materialities, spatialities, and temporalities, are intimately co-implicated in building the quantity and quality of flesh necessary for a body of competition-standard muscularity. In addition, this

³² Throughout this thesis I often employ the prepositional configuration of “through/with/across” rather than using either of these words on their own or, alternatively, using “in” or “on”. This is a deliberate attempt to consistently emphasise the always ongoing and unbounded transversal rendering of materiality that a trans-corporeal analytic underscores. In doing so, I attempt write both through and with trans-corporeality in a way which conceptually “captures” (and provokes) movement, co-participation, inter-connection and porousness, simultaneously; as opposed to a vocabulary which reaffirms conceptual solidity, fixity, separation or stability.

³³ It is important to note the more nuanced ways in which Western culture and science has historically graded the “non-humanness” of different other-than-humans, such as, inanimate objects (which are usually considered definitively “not-human”) or animals (some of which, like primates, are deemed more “proto-human”), as well as Other(ed) humans, such as, women, disabled, Queer, and Black people (who are often valued as “lesser-humans”). While cognisant of these nuances, I am aware at how cumbersome it becomes in restating them. To this effect I will rely more often on the phrase “non-human” as a convenient shorthand.

study aims to understand how competitive male bodybuilders' muscle becomes gendered, in ways which are simultaneously material, discursive, and affective, through such trans-corporeal relations.

The following research question is therefore formulated to address the overarching aims of this study:

How do the trans-corporeal relations between South African competitive male bodybuilders and their more-than-human world(s) work in (1) materialising and (2) gendering their muscle, for competitive participation?

1.4. Putting some (contextual) meat on the bone: South African bodybuilders and the South African body politic.

Before proceeding further, it is necessary for me to highlight that all the bodybuilders participating in this study are South African³⁴: all were born and live in South Africa; all compete on the South African bodybuilding scene at local, regional, and national levels; and all participate on the competitive platforms of locally based affiliates of international bodybuilding organisations. With this said, it is important to recognise that the flesh of the South African men who participate in competitive bodybuilding, like that of all South Africans, cannot be analytically anesthetised from the material and symbolic violences wrought by the centuries of European colonialism which have marked South Africa's history (Martin, Van Wijk, Makhaba, & Hans-Arendse, 2013).

The colonisation of South Africa³⁵ continues to serve as the definitive historical moment when European imported constructions of ethnicity and skin colour were

³⁴ See Appendix G for a brief biographical profile of each of the bodybuilders participating in this study.

³⁵ On the orders of the *Dutch East India Company* (VOC) to establish a permanent settlement for provisioning VOC vessels circumnavigating trades routes past the southern tip of Africa, Jan van Riebeeck landed at Table

representationally forged into “race”³⁶ and, thereafter, ideologically grafted to the anthropometric features of South African bodies (Magubane, 2004). It is through this history that all South Africans have been formed through the structural axes of race, class, and gender (Foster, 2012); and that all South Africans have had their bodies intimately entwined in the social, political, and economic legacies of racialised oppression, resistance, and liberation in South Africa (Ratele, 1998).

With European settlement the vectors of Black³⁷ and White men’s (and women’s) bodies were set on distinctly disparate cultural and economic trajectories in South Africa’s history, for the most part informed by the construction and embodiment of Whiteness and Blackness as dichotomous, universal, and stable traits in colonial discourse (Biko, 1996). The colonisation of South Africa seeded “proto-racial thinking” (Feagin, 2013, p. 39) by bringing with it European-style colonial thinking which presupposed the White (Christian) European man as a higher-order being (Fanon, 1986); in effect, underpinning the reduction of all indigenous people “to their bodies and thus to race” (Dyer, 1997, p. 14).

Under the colonial administration of South Africa, the bodies of Black men “became a critical locus through which ideologies of racial and cultural difference were enacted” (Saint-Aubin, 2005, p. 5). Black bodies were representationally constructed and physically treated as dangerous through the vortices of: (1) Christian missionary religion (Comaroff & Comaroff,

Bay in 1652. van Riebeeck’s arrival at Table Bay (which is today Cape Town) is widely recognised as inaugurating the formal colonisation of South(ern) Africa by the Dutch and, from 1795, the British (Reader, 1998).

³⁶ Race, and constructions thereof, have been central to orientating South Africans’ identities and daily lives since colonialism (Martin & Govender, 2013). For the purpose of this study, race and identifiers of South African differences in regards to race, namely, “Black”, “White”, “Indian”, and “Coloured”, are considered “as socio-political and ideologically-laden constructs” (Ratele, Shefer, & Clowes, 2012, p. 562). There exists no national consensus amongst South Africans on “whom” exactly these labels designate; with the journalist Marianne Thamm (2015) having incisively described the identity politics of race in contemporary South Africa as a “convoluted quagmire of ... classification” (para. 41). Whilst race-based identifiers are contentious and contested; they remain demographic labels “constructed and imposed by colonialists” (Zungu, 2013, p. 2). The reason for my continued use of them in this study should not be read as an uncritical acceptance of them, but, rather, an acknowledgment that racial markers continue to exert a “profound impact on the material lives and experiences ... [of] South African citizens” (Ratele et al., 2012, p. 562).

³⁷ The terms “Black” and “African”, as the most widely accepted demographic vernacular for the historically colonised indigenous “Bantu” population of South(ern) Africa, are used interchangeably.

1997); (2) colonial race science (Craig, 2012; Butchart, 1997, 1998; Schiebinger, 1993); and (3) a colonial system of violent corporal punishment³⁸ (Dawdy, 2006; Rao & Pierce, 2006). In doing so, European men (and their colonial descendants) had their Whiteness disembodied and deracialised (Armstrong, 2000). The White man became culturally cast in his colonial role as Master³⁹, defined as such by his supposedly unique and superior ability “to use his head, ... to manage and control things” (Cleaver, 1969, p. 80). To this effect, muscle and muscularity were not always considered desired features for White men given what was believed to be “their natural mental superiority” (Dyer, 1997, p. 164).

Black men were however constructed as corporeally excessive (Rao & Pierce, 2006). While this was most often seen in the ways that Black men’s sexualities were animalised and virilised through colonial caricatures of their genitalia (Lemelle, 2010); the musculature of Black men was also naturalised and commoditised in colonial South Africa. For the capitalist colonial authorities, the muscle of the colonised Black male body was not only rendered capable of bearing “the burden of extracting material wealth from [the] ... colonial frontier” (Foote, 2004, p. 7), but, moreover, requiring corporeal practices of discipline and punishment in doing so (Ward, 2006). In many ways, this colonial tradition would reach its apex in South Africa during the years of *apartheid*⁴⁰ (1948-1994).

With the ascendancy of the White supremacist and Afrikaner nationalist *Nasionale Party* (or National Party) to governance in 1948, the last vestiges of British colonial power

³⁸ In this regard, Ronald Jackson’s (2006), *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*, offers an examination of the lynching of African-American men. Like colonised African men, the bodies of African-American men were constructed as “Other” through an essentialising ideology of inherent natural difference which pathologised their Blackness and effaced their humanity, thereby permitting acts of extreme violence against their bodies.

³⁹ In South Africa, the White man’s status as superior to men and women of other races was perhaps best represented in his cultural designation (in Afrikaans) as “baas” (or boss) (Martin & Govender, 2011).

⁴⁰ Literally translated from Afrikaans to English, apartheid means “apartness”. One of the principal architects of apartheid and Prime Ministers of South Africa, Hendrik Verwoerd (1901–1966), once infamously described apartheid to the international media as “a policy of good neighbourliness”. Far from that, apartheid was a systemic strategy by the National Party government to consolidate White and specifically Afrikaner domination of the political, economic, and cultural life of South Africa while, at the same time, usurping the possibility for democratic governance and the legal participation of other(ed) racial and ethnic groups in the political process.

dissipated from the echelons of political authority in South Africa. Soon thereafter the National Party government began to legislatively design and implement the system of apartheid. Under apartheid every South African was assigned a race-based classification as the primary marker of their citizenship and identity⁴¹, principal of which were: Black (including: African, Bantu, Native, or Aboriginal); White (including: European or Caucasian); Coloured⁴²; or Indian (including: Asiatic or Asian). While this system of racial classification was, at first, based on the anthropometric assessment of physical characteristics, such as, the dimensions of facial features, skin colour, and hair texture; it was apartheid-era legislation which functioned to structurally connect racial designation to social, economic, and political privileges organised on a sliding-scale with Whites at the top and Coloureds, Indians, and the indigenous majority, Africans, at the bottom of the racial pecking order.

Much like the colonial system of governance, apartheid established a government-sanctioned regime of (power) relations between White and so-called “non-White” South Africans, through a system of laws which regulated how their bodies were allowed to live, move, work, and interact. Shamefully, parts of the largely male-dominated, almost exclusively White, and socially conservative South African academe were coopted to provide an “ideological amalgam that supported ... apartheid thinking” (Dubow, 2010, p. 288). In doing so, apartheid was intellectually substantiated through some scholarly efforts which purported the biologically-based inferiority of Africans (Eloff, 1942; De Villiers, 1968; Galloway, 1941).

Although apartheid eventually collapsed, heralding South Africa’s first democratic elections in 1994 and the dawn of a multi-racial and (politically) free society; the structural legacies and psychological scars of colonialism and apartheid are still very much alive

⁴¹ This was mandated after the all-White South African parliament passed the legislative cornerstone of apartheid, the *Population Registration Act* (Act 30 of 1950).

⁴² The racial epithet “Coloured”, derived from apartheid-era racial vocabulary, typically refers to those South Africans whose race has been historically defined as a genealogical mixture of European (White), African (Black), and Khoi or San heritages (Adhikari, 2006; van Niekerk, 2014).

(Ramphela, 2017). South African identities, even for those who continue to be born after the fall of apartheid, remain almost definitively embedded in race and racialised forms of identification (McKaiser, 2012); and, even twenty-five years into democracy, there remains virtually no corner of South African life untouched by either explicit racism or implied racial prejudice (Mangu, 2015). It is, in this regard, that while this study specifically explores the gendered/ing dimensions of a group of competitive male bodybuilders' trans-corporeal relations with their more-than-human world(s); it would be analytically naïve or, worse, disingenuous to consider the materiality/ies of South African bodybuilders' bodies and the practices which materially build and gender their muscle, to be immune from the racial(ised/ising) inequalities of South African life.

1.5. Outline of the thesis.

In the opening chapter of this thesis I have sought to outline the background, motivation, and overarching aim of this study while also situating the analytical work of this research within the milieu of South African life and the history of South African men's bodies and muscle.

In Chapter Two, I provide an overview of key subcultural trends in the historical development and contemporary trajectory of men's competitive bodybuilding, broadly, and in South Africa, specifically. In addition, I review the academic literature which has dominated the scholarly rendering of competitive male bodybuilders; and, in doing so, identify how this study connects to and builds on existing research on the materiality/ies of competitive male bodybuilders, their muscle, and their muscle-building↔gendering practices.

In Chapter Three, I detail the theoretical influences and directions of this study. In this regard, I develop Stacy Alaimo's feminist-inflected and posthumanist work on *trans-corporeality* and its application to the theoretical and analytical groundwork of this study. In

doing so, I outline the influence of two concepts which feature in my use of trans-corporeality in this study, namely: (1) *intra-activity*; and (2) *affect*.

Chapter Four outlines the methodological work of this study. I begin by evaluating how visual research methodologies, generally, and *autophotography*, in particular, have been developed in the critical study of men, their bodies, and their bodily practices. Here, I specifically consider the uses and challenges of autophotography with competitive male bodybuilders. Following this, I trace the methodological, analytical, and ethical practices of this study as it (re)orientated from a humanocentric and qualitative research methodology to a more posthumanist and post-qualitative *research-assemblage*.

In Chapters Five and Six, I unpack the findings of this study. This is done in terms of the two primary dimensions that co-compose the research question of this study, namely: (1) the materiality or material-building of muscle; and (2) the gendering or gender(ed)-building of muscle. Thus, while Chapter Five focusses on exploring how the muscle of competitive male bodybuilders becomes trans-corporeally co-constituted through the materialities of their more-than-human world(s); Chapter Six focuses on examining how the material agencies of competitive male bodybuilders' muscle co-participate in shaping how their muscle becomes gendered and is built in gendered/ing ways through trans-corporeal relations with their more-than-human world(s).

The final chapter of this thesis, Chapter Seven, includes an examination of this study's principal findings and contributions. Thereafter I discuss some of the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research.

**“I sing of arms and the man, of weight rooms and muscle pits, of biceps and triceps,
bench presses and low pulley rows, of young and old, woman and man, straining and
hoisting iron ... I sing of dreamers and addicts, rogues and visionaries.”**

- Samuel Wilson Fussell, in *Muscle: Confessions of an Unlikely Bodybuilder* (1991, p. 15),
reflects on what it is to tell the story of muscle in the world of competitive bodybuilding.

CHAPTER 2: COMPETITIVE BODYBUILDING, MUSCLE, AND MEN

In this chapter I explore the world of men's competitive bodybuilding. The aim of this chapter is to provide a broad understanding of the subcultural development of men's competitive bodybuilding, broadly, and in South Africa, more particularly, as well as review the literature which has emerged in the study of competitive male bodybuilders, their muscle, and their muscle-building↔gendering practices. In doing so, the chapter is divided into three sections, followed by a concluding fourth section.

In the first section, I trace the historical evolution of what is today identified as the subculture of men's organised competitive bodybuilding.

In the second section, I focus on the development of competitive bodybuilding in South Africa. Here, I examine the state of men's competitive bodybuilding in South Africa and highlight the (limited) existing research on South African competitive male bodybuilders.

In the third section, I present a critical review of the dominant trends in theoretical and empirical work on competitive male bodybuilders. For the purpose of this review I subdivide existing research into what I have dubbed four broad "bodies" of academic literature on men's competitive bodybuilding, namely: (1) the seminal ethnographic work of Alan Klein and, with this, the early (pro)feminist critique of male bodybuilders; (2) risk-oriented research focused on the competitive practices of male bodybuilders; (3) scholarship which has expanded the embodied and emplaced dimensions of male bodybuilders' identities, bodies, and practices; and (4) a smaller set of studies which have explored the more sensual, material, and fleshy dimensions of male bodybuilders, their bodies, and their muscle.

In sum, I conclude the chapter with an evaluation of the literature reviewed and outline the gaps in the existing bodies of scholarly work. In this regard, I identify how a trans-corporeal rendering of competitive male bodybuilders, their muscle, and their muscle-building↔gendering practices, both connects to and builds on existing research.

2.1. The world of men's competitive bodybuilding: A brief his/tory.

According to Murray (1984), bodybuilding is “one of the oldest sports known to man” (p. 195). Indeed, the subcultural roots of men's competitive bodybuilding lie in the muscle-building and strength training routines employed by men to enhance their physical capacity for participation in war and sport in, at first, ancient China, Egypt, and India (Roach, 2008) and, later, the empires of Greece and Rome (Gaines, 2001; Kennedy, 2008; Murray, 1984; Schwarzenegger & Dobbins, 1998). However, for Dutton and Laura (1989), the subculture of men's organised competitive bodybuilding, as we know of it today, did not emerge from a single historical lineage but evolved through a “culmination and convergence of existing trends” (p. 30). For Dutton and Laura (1989), Dutton (1995), and Locks (2012a), three events occurring during the latter part of the 1800s in Western Europe served as important ingredients for the emergence of the earliest (proto)bodybuilders.

First amongst these developments was the growing appeal of the vaudevillian strongman tradition “which used the popular stage as a focus for physical display” (Dutton, 1995, p. 119). Strongmen had long delighted the audiences of European carnivals, vaudevilles, and circuses by performing feats of strength, such as, carrying livestock. Yet the strongman was largely unconcerned about the physical appearance or aesthetic quality of their musculature – many of whom were in fact burly, stocky, and pot-bellied (Dutton, 1995).

Second was the rise of the Physical Culture movement in Western Europe from the mid-nineteenth century. The practice of Physical Culture stemmed from a philosophy which held that personal health and wellbeing was cultivated through regular routines of physical exercise, including, strength training and calisthenics. The popularity of Physical Culture

quickly spread throughout the middle-class men of Western Europe and, thereafter, across the Atlantic to North America⁴³ (Churchill, 2008; Wedemeyer, 1994).

Third, and most significantly, was the invention of the camera and the popularisation of photography. According to Locks (2012a), bodybuilding “would likely never have achieved the success it did if it had not been for photography” (p. 5). At the turn of twentieth century, the aesthetic display of the body had been limited to those classic mediums of clay and canvas (Dutton 1995). Photography however propelled the popularity of muscular men by splashing images of their bodies across the pages of the first bourgeois society magazines in Europe and North America (Dutton & Laura, 1989).

Standing at the intersection of these three developments was Prussian-born Eugen Sandow (1867-1925) (Dutton, 1995; Dutton & Laura, 1989; Locks, 2012a). Originally discovered and trained by the famous vaudevillian and Physical Culturalist Louis Atilla (1844-1924) in the 1880s, Sandow had toured Western Europe showcasing his strongman routine. Sandow’s physique marked a shift from other vaudevillian strongmen of his time – his body was muscularly solid and defined. In 1893, Sandow came under the mentorship of the legendary promoter Florenz Ziegfeld Jr. (1867-1932) who introduced Sandow to audiences in the United States of America (USA) as the “Strongest Man in the World”. Sandow’s act proved innovative in shifting “the audience’s attention from the strength of the male physique to the look of the physique” (Dutton, 1995, p. 122). Channelling ancient Greco-Roman sculptures, Sandow used posing routines to highlight his muscularity and, in so doing, making “the live display of a male body in the public arena ... an object to be admired solely by virtue of its advanced muscular development” (Dutton, 1995, p. 122).

⁴³ The popularity of Physical Culture amongst the European and North American middle-classes was particularly spurred by the rise of bourgeois cultural faddisms, including, the “German Life Reform Movement” (Wedemeyer, 1994) and “Muscular Christianity” (MacAloon, 2013) which, together, provided a religio-cultural “blend of physical health, muscular development, and Christian morality” (Churchill, 2008, p. 353) that constituted a response by European and North American Protestants to the perceived effeminacy, lack of discipline, and moral ambiguity of men in the early 1900s (Putney, 2001).

Another significant innovation at this time was Sandow's production of the magazine series *Physical Culture*, one of the first of its kind, in 1898. Interestingly, however, Sandow's magazine had come in the wake of American entrepreneur and fellow Physical Culturalist Bernarr Macfadden's (1868-1955) magazine, *Physical Development*. Both publications mixed together Physical Culture ideology with strength training equipment and products (Dutton, 1995); in effect marking the first commercially-minded "promotion and publishing operations" (Hotten, 2004, p. 27) popularising the aesthetically-oriented development of men's bodies and their muscles.

One of the most significant developments at this time was the promotion of physique contests for men sponsored by the likes of Sandow and Macfadden as vehicles for self-promotion and to increase magazine sales. Although Sandow first held one such "Great Competition", in 1901 (Dutton, 1995); it was Macfadden's "Most Perfectly Developed Man" contest, which offered 1,000 USD in cash winnings, that gained the most significant traction at this time. In the USA, Macfadden's contest produced the first major names of the muscular development scene⁴⁴ (Dutton, 1995; Hotten, 2004; Stokvis, 2006). It was around this time that the term "bodybuilding" now formatively "entered the English language to describe the building of muscularity – as distinct from increasing one's strength or improving one's health – by means of physical culture using weights or exercise machines" (Dutton, 1995, p. 124).

In 1940, the *Amateur Athletic Union* (AAU), a sporting guild which organised and regulated amateur sports in the USA, introduced the "Mr America" contest which, at least at first, required competitors to participate in both competitive displays of physical strength (a weightlifting component) as well as have their physiques adjudicated through posing and flexing routines (a bodybuilding component), and from which an overall winner would be

⁴⁴ One such name is that of Charles Atlas (1893-1972), born Angelino Siciliano, who parlayed his 1921 winnings into a lucrative marketing campaign for his exercise regimen entitled "Dynamic Tension". Atlas's "ninety-seven-pound weakling" advertisement would become one of the most successful campaigns popularising muscular development to a generation of young boys and men in the USA (Luciano, 2001).

crowned “America’s Best Built Man” (Fair, 2015). It is worth noting that the “Mr America” contest set in motion a series of events which would increasingly culminate in the development of bodybuilding as an independent discipline of competitive activity (or sport) specifically organised around the aesthetic adjudication of muscular development. First, with the AAU’s cultural legitimacy and nation-wide association to sport, bodybuilding achieved a level of social respectability and reach within the USA that it had previously had difficulty attaining (Dutton, 1995; Stokvis, 2006). Second, the foundational elements for organising a bodybuilding event *as* a competitive contest were tentatively established through the “Mr America” tournaments, as Dutton (1995) outlines:

The codification of rules and judging criteria shifted the focus of attention away from individualistic display onto group competition: compulsory poses were introduced ...; standards of costumes were laid down ...; and the practice of a panel of judges independently scoring competitors according to fixed criteria of muscularity, symmetry, proportion, definition and posing ability conferred on the selection of place-getters an atmosphere of almost clinical objectivity. (pp. 140-141).

Third, as the bodybuilding component of the “Mr America” contest increasingly placed emphasis on the aesthetic appearance and presentation of muscular development, and not the demonstrable evidence of physical strength, the tournament highlighted what was an already growing schism between the competitive philosophies and practices of bodybuilding and weightlifting. No longer satisfied with being “an adjunct to weightlifting” (Dutton, 1995, p. 130), the divide between bodybuilding and weightlifting was cemented in the decades that followed as the first organisations dedicated to competitive bodybuilding were founded, including: the IFBB, in Canada and the USA, in 1946; NABBA, in the United Kingdom (UK), in 1950; and, later, WABBA, in 1975.

From the outset, the most influential of these organisations was, and arguably still is, the IFBB. Founded by Canadian brothers Joseph (Joe) (1920-2013) and Ben Weider⁴⁵ (1923-2008); the IFBB provided organised and commercially-supported platforms for those men interested in competitive bodybuilding. In this regard, the Weiders' launched their magazine *Muscle Builder*, in 1953⁴⁶, as a commercial revenue stream through which to market themselves, their products, the IFBB and its contest platforms. This magazine would go on to become the staple for almost all competitive bodybuilders and muscle acolytes for thirty years until its rebranding as *Muscle and Fitness*, in 1980⁴⁷.

In addition, under the mantle of the IFBB, the Weiders' introduced two bodybuilding tournaments which quickly became the subcultural epicentre of the competitive community in the formative years of organised bodybuilding, namely: the "Mr Universe", in 1959, for amateur bodybuilders; and, later, the "Mr Olympia", in 1965, which could only be entered by winners of the "Mr Universe". The prize money the IFBB was able to offer competitors for winning these tournaments, in large part through the success of the Weiders' increasingly profitable commercial enterprises, quickly outstripped what other bodybuilding organisations could offer for their contests and, in turn, helped to cement the popularity and elitism of the "Mr Olympia", specifically, and the IFBB, more broadly, amongst bodybuilders.

To grade and recognise competitive achievement within the IFBB the Weiders' introduced the IFBB "pro" card system which formally granted "professional" status to the most successful competitive bodybuilders, allowing them to compete at the most elite and cash-rewarding tournaments hosted by the IFBB. Yet, at the same time, the "pro" card system

⁴⁵ In forming the IFBB, the Weider brothers split from the AAU over increasing tensions with Bob Hoffman (1898-1985), one of the most dominant figures in the AAU and North American weightlifting. Where the Weiders believed bodybuilding was a legitimate sporting discipline which could be separated on its own merits from competitive weightlifting; Hoffman believed that bodybuilding should remain part of weightlifting.

⁴⁶ This was in fact a rebranding of their earlier less popular magazine *Your Physique*, which had been launched in the 1940s.

⁴⁷ Today, the Weider publications of *Muscle and Fitness* and *Flex*, the two most dominant publications within the competitive (and recreational) bodybuilding community have circulations in excess of 7 million readers worldwide.

also allowed the IFBB to set particular contractual and competitive obligations over those bodybuilders who were awarded “pro” cards⁴⁸.

During this period the subcultural nucleus of competitive bodybuilding increasingly localised in Southern California, for the most part constituted by two important sites which sustained the core subculture of early competitive bodybuilders, namely: (1) a small stretch of Venice Beach where bodybuilders would train in an open-air training pen known as “Muscle Beach”; and (2) *Gold’s Gym*, a chain of gyms founded by Joe Gold (1922-2004) in 1965 – which would also come to be known as the “Mecca of Bodybuilding” (Locks, 2012a, p. 10). For Locks (2012a), this early period of competitive bodybuilding embraced what he calls the “American classic aesthetic” (p. 10), that is, a “classically developed body that, like the ancient Greeks, placed emphasis on proportion, shape, and symmetry rather than size” (p. 11). However, while competitive bodybuilding had, between the 1940s and 1960s, made significant subcultural strides in establishing a core and committed community of acolytes; it was only with the arrival of Arnold Schwarzenegger, in the 1970s, that competitive bodybuilding would attain a much greater degree of international attention and appeal.

Schwarzenegger’s six-foot two-inch physique was a colossus of (235lb) muscularity which had never before been seen in competitive bodybuilding⁴⁹. Under the mentorship (and marketing) of Joe Weider, Schwarzenegger’s charm, charisma, and, to paraphrase Dutton (1995), his unambiguous heterosexuality, was combined with his competitive successes⁵⁰ to make him the international poster boy of competitive bodybuilding, generally, and the IFBB, specifically. Naturally, Schwarzenegger became the focus for the 1975 docu-drama *Pumping*

⁴⁸ To emphasise the virtual stranglehold the Weiders had over the bodybuilders which competed in the IFBB, Hotten (2004) observed: “Every Mr O[lympia], every Mr America, every Mr Universe, every musclehead with any dream of making a living went through Joe Weider, and if [they] didn’t go through Joe, [they] went through Ben [Weider]” (p. 51).

⁴⁹ So much so that Dutton (1995) describes Schwarzenegger’s rib-cage as “so massive ... he could balance a glass of water on his flexed pectoral muscles” (p. 145).

⁵⁰ During his competitive career Schwarzenegger went on to win a record-setting five “Mr Universe” and seven “Mr Olympia” titles.

Iron (Butler et al., 1977), based on the titular book by Gaines and Butler (1974). *Pumping Iron* proved ground-breaking in introducing the North American public, specifically, and Western audiences, broadly, to both Schwarzenegger and the world of men's competitive bodybuilding. According to Hotten (2004), *Pumping Iron* "humanised muscle and the men that had it, remov[ing] bodybuilding from that shadowy corner" (p. 143) of American culture, and providing it with mainstream appeal. In Schwarzenegger's wake, the 1970s marked a kind of "Golden Age" for competitive bodybuilding in the West: characterised by its increasing mainstream popularity, and aided by Schwarzenegger's transition into Hollywood superstar⁵¹. In fact, the 1970s saw such exponential growth in competitive bodybuilding that women were finally welcomed into the previously all-male fold of the IFBB in 1978, followed by the creation of the "Ms Olympia" tournament in 1980⁵².

Today, however, the hardcore centre of men's competitive bodybuilding is considered to have experienced a decline in overall popularity within mainstream Western (pop)culture (Locks 2012a; Probert, 2009). Public knowledge of steroid use by competitive male bodybuilders as well as the normalisation of more athletically toned and so-called "fit" bodies with the rise of health/fitness/body-image industries within Western(ised) culture has meant that the bodies and unique muscular development of male bodybuilders has experienced a contraction in both their appeal and marketability (Locks, 2012a; Staszal, 2009). At the same time, the competitive criteria, judges, audiences, and participants are seen to have become

⁵¹ In the 1980s, Schwarzenegger's casting in *Conan the Barbarian* (1982) and *Terminator* (1984) were to make him one of many muscled-up action heroes to achieve celebrity status, including, former bodybuilders Sylvester Stallone, in *Rocky* (1976) and *Rambo: First Blood* (1982), as well as Lou Ferrigno, in the television series *The Incredible Hulk* (1978-1982).

⁵² Some thirty years on, women's competitive bodybuilding is virtually extinct (Hunter, 2013). In 2012, the IFBB Executive Council officially inaugurated the "women's physique" division (IFBB, 2017b). According to the IFBB (2017b), this division has sought to cater to those female competitors "who prefer to develop a less muscular, yet athletic and aesthetically pleasing physique, unlike former women's bodybuilders" (p. 2). According to BBSA (2018d), the introduction of the women's physique division sought to replace women's bodybuilding on the grounds "that the pure bodybuilding, aimed at extreme muscular development and extreme dryness was not a popular category amongst women" (p. 2).

progressively more insistent on seeing levels of muscular development which can only be achieved through the use of steroids (Dimitrios, 2012, Staszal, 2009).

These developments have, over past thirty years, gradually ushered in what Hotten (2004) describes as the “Era of the Freak” (p. 261) in men’s competitive bodybuilding⁵³. Today, a competitor’s physique must be a massive, heaving mass of thick, dense, and ultra-cut muscular development, should he wish to achieve meaningful competitive success and, more importantly, sustained sponsorship⁵⁴. These factors have impelled many (but not all) competitive male bodybuilders to increasingly pursue an extreme array of chemical (and surgical) interventions coupled with ascetic dietary and exercise practices. The resultant physiques and muscular development represent what Locks (2012a) now calls the “post classic aesthetic”, that is, “an incongruent set of muscles, a fragmentary physique” (p. 15).

However, not all competitive male bodybuilders have become enamoured with the pursuit of extreme muscular development. In 2004, the IFBB was renamed the *International Federation of Bodybuilding and Fitness*. This rebranding has been seen by some as part of an effort by the IFBB to diversify men (and women’s) bodybuilding in terms of the competitive divisions available to male (and female) competitors. However, while many of the newer competitive divisions make a deliberate turn away from excessive muscle mass towards what appears to be more normative, sexually appealing, and marketable levels of muscular

⁵³ According to Richardson (2012) there is no single reason for the rise of the “freak aesthetic” in men’s competitive bodybuilding, but, rather, three inter-related subcultural developments, including: (1) the birth and growth of women’s competitive bodybuilding, and women bodybuilders’ (chemically-assisted) capacity to craft quantities of muscle akin to that of men’s muscular development; (2) the emergence of more mainstream athletically toned muscularities; and (3) an ongoing “paranoid attempt to extricate itself from the connotation of homoeroticism” (p. 194) that has persisted since competitive bodybuilding’s subcultural inception.

⁵⁴ Looking at the numbers, Hotten’s (2004) argument appears quite compelling. Larry Scott, the first winner of the “Mr Olympia” weighed in at 208lbs while the current champion, Phil Heath, is a whopping 250lbs: a difference of 49lbs in just under forty-nine years. Similarly, Kennedy (2008) points out that the winners of the “Mr Olympia” tournament have become more massive and defined than their predecessors, such as, for example, Sergio Oliva (230lbs), in the 1960s; Arnold Schwarzenegger (240lbs), in the 1970s; Lee Haney (250lbs), in the 1980s; Dorian Yates (260lbs), in the 1990s; and Ronnie Coleman and Jay Cutler (over 280lbs respectively), in the 2000s. It is also interesting to note that as the overall bodyweight of the “Mr Olympia” winners has increased, so too has their prize money which, in 1975, was about 1,000 USD and, today, is roughly 250,000 USD (Vallett, 2017)

development for men; most of these competitive divisions still require competitive practices which produce levels of muscular development and bodyfat depletion for the most part unattainable without the assistance of steroids.

In this regard, it is particularly worth noting that at the IFBB's 2005 congress in Shanghai, their Executive Council endorsed the creation of a new competitive division to fall within the broader ambit of men's competitive bodybuilding, namely, the "men's classic bodybuilding" division. More akin to the athletically toned and "fit" body (Luciano, 2001; Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000), the "classic bodybuilding" division requires that its participants develop (in vaguely defined terms) a "healthy, fit, athletic looking muscular physique, in an attractively presented "total package" " (IFBB, 2017a, p. 2, quotations original). In sharp contrast to the "freak aesthetic", the "classic aesthetic" places "emphasis on [muscular] proportion, shape and symmetry rather than size" (Locks, 2012a, p. 11). Interestingly, since its introduction, men's classic bodybuilding has gone from strength to strength with even the USA-based National Physique Committee (NPC), the most influential amateur affiliate of the IFBB, announcing that 2016 would herald the birth of a new category for male bodybuilders participating in their competitive circuit: the classic physique division⁵⁵ (NPC News Online, 2015). The rise of men's classic bodybuilding and, with this, the classic physique, has prompted some anxiety in the competitive fraternity amongst those bodybuilders subculturally invested in the "freak aesthetic"⁵⁶ (See Lobliner, 2015).

It goes without saying that the IFBB has been at the forefront in moulding the historically and currently favoured muscular aesthetics for competitive male bodybuilders

⁵⁵ The classic physique division has been, much like classic bodybuilding, billed for male bodybuilders "who want to present more muscular size than is currently acceptable for [the] Men's Physique [division], but not as extreme as the current standards for Bodybuilding [division]" (NPC News Online, 2015, para. 2).

⁵⁶ Concerned about the future of their competitive existence some male bodybuilders have drawn parallels between the introduction of classic bodybuilding with the rise of the physique division in women's bodybuilding. This is a comparison not necessarily unfounded. Hunter (2013) has suggested that the women's physique division, with its explicit demand for smaller levels of muscular development and expressed femininity, was the "first step toward replacing the female bodybuilder with a more feminine version of the muscular female physique" (p. 50).

(Lowe, 1998). The IFBB, almost singlehandedly, has crafted the bodies, personas, and careers of those male bodybuilders who have served as the muscular templates and aspirational archetypes for the men within this subculture, and for many men (and boys) outside of this community and across the world. This is, in large part, due to the contractual and marketing grip the IFBB wields over its “pro” bodybuilders; the lucrative and life-sustaining patronage it dispenses through sponsorship and endorsement deals; the “cultural cache” (Staszal, 2009, p. 17) and competitive pinnacle that its tournaments represent, in particular, the “Mr Olympia”; and its corporate dominance which includes the most widely distributed, profitable, and influential network of publishing, television, and online media platforms amongst competitive bodybuilders (Vallet, 2017). The IFBB, now a global commercial entity with hundreds of affiliates across the world is, undoubtedly, the single most influential and powerful bodybuilding federation shaping the trajectory of men’s competitive bodybuilding and, more pointedly, the muscular aesthetics of competitive male bodybuilders, the world over.

2.2. Men’s competitive bodybuilding in South Africa: From apartheid to democracy.

The first formal bodybuilding competitions took shape in apartheid South Africa, during the 1940s⁵⁷. It is, therefore, not surprising that racial division marked the early formation of the South African Amateur Bodybuilding Union (SAABU), South Africa’s first competitive bodybuilding organisation⁵⁸. As the only officially recognised affiliate of the IFBB in South Africa, SAABU would evolve over the next sixty years to become today’s BBSA (also

⁵⁷ South Africa’s apartheid-era racialised hierarchy of privileges included the segregated regulation of all sport and recreational activities (Archer, 1987; Hargreaves; 1997; Ramsamy, 1982).

⁵⁸ In 1950, soon after the formation of SAABU, racial tensions between White as well as Black and Coloured bodybuilders resulted in the breakaway of the South African Amateur Weightlifting and Bodybuilding Federation (SAAW&BF). SAAW&BF owed its formation to “[C]oloured and [B]lack weightlifting [and bodybuilding] athletes who were sidelined by the then apartheid government when it came to selecting teams for international competition[s]” (Western Province Natural Bodybuilding Union, n.d., para. 2).

known as IFBBSA) – arguably the most dominant, well-organised, and well-funded bodybuilding organisation in South Africa.

According to the Weider brothers' 2006 autobiography, *Brothers of Iron*, Ben Weider recounted that he “had a longstanding fondness for South Africa, which in 1947 became the first nation outside of North America to join the IFBB” (p. 218). It is, however, unclear as to what happened to South Africa's membership status for the twenty-six years after 1947 when, according to IFBB records, a South African delegation from SAABU successfully applied for membership to the IFBB at their 1973 congress⁵⁹ (IFBB, n.d.). Interestingly, at the same congress, the IFBB awarded one of their premier tournaments for 1975, the World Bodybuilding Championships (WBC), which then included the IFBB's prestigious “Mr Universe” and “Mr Olympia” events, to Pretoria: apartheid South Africa's executive capital and the cultural heart of racist Afrikanerdom and White supremacy (Wayne, 1985). In justifying their decision, the IFBB (n.d.) recorded:

... [South Africa] has been barred from many international sports associations because of its racist policies The IFBB was [however] assured that no discrimination of any kind would be permitted ... nor would any prejudice attend possible international meets in that country. Consequently, South Africa was warmly accepted into the IFBB brotherhood (para. 1).⁶⁰

While Ben Weider has gone on to argue that awarding South Africa the WBC tournament “represented a major victory against racism” (Weider & Weider, 2006, p. 221); my efforts in

⁵⁹ The SAABU reportedly “sent black (Mr. Thabebe) and white (Mr. Bester) representatives to plead their case” (IFBB, n.d.) for IFBB membership. After an extensive search through IFBB, BBSA and (what remains of) SAABU documentation, there is no further record of a “Mr Thabebe”. It is likely that the “Mr Bester” being referred to here was in fact “Mrs” Lolly Bester, Secretary General of SAABU at the time.

⁶⁰ In 1975, a letter from the then Minister of Sport in the apartheid government, Dr. Piet Koornhof, guaranteed the IFBB that: “... all athletes, regardless of racial, political or religious beliefs will be received on an equal basis ... the same applies to all South African white and Non-white participants who may qualify for participation” (IFBB, n.d.).

sourcing and examining publically available records of the Pretoria-based tournament do not reflect the competitive participation of any South African born Black bodybuilders⁶¹.

Since the collapse of apartheid in 1994, and South Africa's readmission to the international sporting community, a number of developments have transformed the local scene of competitive bodybuilding. The first significant development has been the growth in the number of bodybuilding organisations which host competitive bodybuilding contests, including, South African affiliates of the IFBB, NABBA, and WABBA.

The second major development has been the steady diversification of competitive divisions and weight-classes available to male bodybuilders. Following the lead of the IFBB, BBSA has also responded to the increasingly excessive muscle mass and size being produced within men's competitive bodybuilding by introducing a "men's classic bodybuilding" division for South African male bodybuilders. Running parallel to the much longer standing "men's bodybuilding" division, classic bodybuilding attempts to cater for those South African bodybuilders who do not wish to build "their muscles to their extreme" (Brown, 2014, p. 52), but, rather, prefer to develop a muscular aesthetic which emphasises "proportion, symmetry, balance and ... muscular perfection" (Brown, 2014, p. 52).

Lastly, and probably the most significant development, has been the increasing presence of Black, Coloured, and Indian bodybuilders into what was a largely White-dominated competitive scene under apartheid. However, despite the increasing participation of historically marginalised bodybuilders within the competitive circuits of South African bodybuilding; racial discrimination remains an obstacle for many Black, Coloured, and Indian bodybuilders who, even twenty-five years after the death of apartheid, still recount painful stories of discrimination within the competitive bodybuilding community by

⁶¹ In fact, former professional bodybuilder Rick Wayne (1985) noted that the only Black South Africans seemingly "participating" in the tournament were the "bus-boys" (p. 142) at the local hotels.

bodybuilding administrators, judges, and sponsors – many of whom are White⁶² (Martin, 2015).

In light of the abovementioned, it is interesting to note that the scholarly study of South African bodybuilding/ers is virtually nonexistent. To date there exist no published critical social science studies involving competitive bodybuilders and only one clinical study⁶³ (Hitzeroth, Wessels, Zungu-Dirwayi, Oosthuizen, & Stein, 2001).

2.3. Men and muscle in competitive bodybuilding: The bodies of scholarly work.

The scholarly literature on male bodybuilders represents a wide array of research drawing from a diverse base of theoretical perspectives, including: psychoanalysis (Grosz, 1994; Klein, 1993a; Simpson, 1994); psychologically-oriented personality theory (Klein, 1990; Porcerelli & Sandler, 1995); phenomenology (Bailey, 2013; Monaghan, 2001; Probert, 2009); trans-disciplinary embodiment research (Roussel, Monaghan, Javerlhiac, & Le Yondre, 2010); risk theory (Probert, Palmer, & Leberman, 2007b; Prober & Leberman, 2009); postmodern sociology (Lindsay, 1996; Roussel & Griffet, 2000; Shilling, 1993; Sparkes, Batey, & Brown, 2005); Bourdieuan philosophy (Bridges, 2009; Wacquant, 1995); existential perspectives (Brown, 1999); Queer theory (Richardson, 2004; Schippert, 2007); and feminism (Gillett & White, 1992; Walters, 1978).

In her doctoral research on competitive bodybuilders in New Zealand (NZ), Probert (2009) noted what she considered two broad types of bodybuilding scholarship: “research that has adopted an *external perspective* of bodybuilders ... and research that has emphasised *identity experiences* from the perspective of bodybuilders” (p. 80, emphasis added). While

⁶² It is worth noting that experiences of both institutional and personal racism mentioned here are similar to findings about racism within other disciplines of competitive sport in South Africa (Booth, 1998; Jarvie, 1985/2014) as well as within competitive bodybuilding elsewhere in the world (Boyle, 2003; Heywood, 1998).

⁶³ This study, which used diagnostic interviews, found that 12 competitive male bodybuilders met the proposed diagnostic criteria for “muscle dysmorphia”, from a total sample of 24 male bodybuilders (Hitzeroth et al., 2001). The study of competitive bodybuilders and “muscle dysmorphia” is discussed in subsection 2.3.2.

the “externalist” body of research is geared towards the analysis of the competitive bodybuilding subculture, including, group practices, shared systems of meaning, and communal processes of risk and reward endowment; the “subjectivist” body of research is aimed at offering insight into the subjective processes of identity construction and meaning-making for competitive bodybuilders, including, for example, phenomenological work which focusses bodybuilders’ embodied experiences of their bodies and bodybuilding practices.

Methodologically speaking, ethnographies (Andrews, Sudwell, & Sparkes, 2005; Bridges, 2009; Klein, 1993a), qualitative interview-based research (Brown, 1999; Monaghan, 2002; Monaghan, Bloor, Dobash, & Dobash, 2000), quantitative questionnaires (Goldfield, 2009; Porcerelli & Sandler, 1995), as well as cultural critique (Day, 1990; Roundtree, 2005; Vertinsky, 1999), have featured as the most prominent modes of generating scholarly work on/with bodybuilders. All of these methodological approaches do however appear within both the “externalist” and “subjectivist” types of bodybuilding research.

For the analysis that follows, which focusses on the ways scholarly work on/with competitive bodybuilding/ers has rendered competitive male bodybuilders and, in particular, the materiality of their muscle and their muscle-building↔gendering practices, I have subdivided the literature into four “bodies” of academic work. First, is the seminal ethnographic work of Alan Klein and, with this, the early feminist critique of male bodybuilders. Second, is a largely medical(ised) group of studies aimed at exploring dimensions of risk in male bodybuilders competitive practices. Third, is a theoretically diverse base of postmodern, phenomenological, and Queer inspired scholarship which has contributed more nuanced and less pejorative accounts of bodybuilders embodied and emplaced identities. Lastly, is a small set of studies which take the fleshy sensuality and materiality of bodybuilders’ bodies and muscle as the primary point of critical interest.

2.3.1. Hollow muscle: The oeuvre of Alan Klein and the (pro)feminist critique of male bodybuilders.

The first body of scholarship on male bodybuilders and men's competitive bodybuilding is largely constituted by the work of cultural anthropologist Alan Klein (1981, 1985a, 1985b, 1986, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1995), and scholars who have followed in his wake (Gillett & White, 1992; Rubinstein, 2003; Wacquant, 1995; White & Gillett, 1994; Wolke & Sapouna, 2008). Prior to Klein's work there had been only a sparse collection of studies on (men's) bodybuilding (Darden, 1972; Fuchs & Zaichkowsky, 1983; Thirer & Greer, 1978, 1981; Walters, 1978). As a central referencing point for almost all researchers who have since come to study bodybuilding/ers, Klein's (1993a) opus, *Little Big Men*, was the product of a seven-year ethnography between 1979 and 1986, at four bodybuilding gyms on the West Coast of Southern California. Throughout this work, Klein's (1993a) central thesis is that the majority of men who come to dedicate their lives and bodies to bodybuilding are largely driven by "gender insecurities" (p. 280).

For Klein (1993a), male bodybuilders' build fleshy fortresses of muscle to guard against a host of masculine "insecurities trapped at their core"⁶⁴ (p. 270) which render a hollowed-out sense of self or "internal emptiness" (Probert, Leberman, & Palmer, 2007a, p. 6). Thus, for Klein (1986, 1987, 1989), the excessive and ascetic muscle-building practices of bodybuilding come to function as compensatory; providing male bodybuilders a means through which to quite literally, in his words, build masculinity "on to the body" (Klein, 1993a, p. 17) by building muscle. Klein (1993a) posits that the subculture of men's bodybuilding becomes predicated on the belief that the appearance of visibly built muscle not only signifies masculinity, but, moreover, masculinist tropes of strength, toughness and

⁶⁴ Klein does explicitly mention some of these male insecurities, including, "shortness and stuttering" (1990, p. 129), small stature (1995), and negative boyhood experiences, such as, for example, bullying (1993a).

dominance. Muscle, for Klein (1993a), symbolically recuperates masculinity and, by extension, masculine power.

According to Klein (1993a), this is sustained by two deeply-rooted values within the bodybuilding subculture: (1) *gender narcissism*, namely, “mirroring back to a person his or her gender as an ideal” (p. 215); and (2) *femiphobia*, that is, the fear of “appearing female, or effeminate” (p. 269). For Klein (1993a), these two values come to subtend almost all aspects of competitive bodybuilding. It is therefore no surprise that competitively building muscle becomes characterised by some of the most extreme forms of masculinism, including, authoritarianism (Klein, 1986), homophobia (Klein, 1989) and hypermasculinity (Klein, 1993a) – especially in light of any perceived vanity, homoeroticism, and femininity, which traditionally becomes associated with practices which alter bodily shape and appearance.

For Klein (1993a), because “[i]t is not the ability to *do* something ... that is demonstrated in bodybuilding, but rather the ability to *look* like one might be able to do something” (p. 250, emphasizes original); the practices which both materially build and gender male bodybuilders’ muscle come to operate at multiple levels of contradiction⁶⁵. Klein (1986, 1987, 1989, 1993a, 1995) does however point out that bodybuilding’s crisis of *form* (the image of built muscle and its symbolic strength) versus *function* (the actual, demonstrated physical strength of built muscle) becomes subculturally belied through discursive regimes which enshrine muscle-building practices a gendered/masculine form of labour. Klein (1993a) asserts that men’s bodybuilding “fetishizes labour by creating something that appears as both a byproduct of labour and a precondition for labour: the muscled physique” (p. 249).

⁶⁵ For Klein, some of these contradictions include: (1) bodybuilding’s sport dilemma, that is, whether it is in fact a legitimate form of competitive sport or a form of pageantry; (2) the discrepancy between bodybuilders’ advocacy of healthy lifestyles to the outside world compared to the actual practices of bodybuilding which involve unhealthy behaviours, such as, steroid use; (3) the projection of Western body image ideals which connote masculine strength, power, and perseverance, compared to the bodybuilders’ psychological feelings of masculine inadequacy and insecurity; and (4) the fervent admonishing of homosexuality in men’s bodybuilding versus the “gay-for-pay” phenomenon of hustling by some heterosexual male bodybuilders to support their bodybuilding careers.

Interestingly, much of the early feminist critique of male bodybuilders shared the sentiments of the Kleinian thesis that male bodybuilders were largely motivated to build muscle because of insecurities rooted in their experience of their own masculinity⁶⁶. For example, Gillett and White (1992) proposed that male bodybuilders' muscle-building was motivated by a need to soothe both personal and social anxieties prompted by women's empowerment. Later, after studying advertisements in the internationally circulated bodybuilding magazine *Flex*, White and Gillett (1994) concluded that "bodybuilding discourses address the erosion of power felt by many men" (p. 19). Similarly, Wacquant (1995) concurred with Klein by arguing that male bodybuilders' drive for hyper-muscularity only revealed a "battle against their own sense of vulnerability" (p. 171). With that said, some critical autobiographical work by former competitive male bodybuilders, including, Fussell (1991), Giraldi (2009), and Solotaroff (2010), have also attested to the linkages between their pursuit of bodybuilding and difficult boyhood experiences and developmental negotiations of masculinity – lending credence to the Kleinian (1993a) thought that male bodybuilders' muscularly built bodies ultimately come to mark a sense of "personal validation" (p. 264).

Interestingly, Wolke and Sapouna (2009) explored childhood bullying in 100 male bodybuilders and concluded that "feeling weak and pushed around can lead to taking up bodybuilding" (p. 602). Similarly, in a life history case study, Sparkes, Batey and Owen (2012) found that a competitive male bodybuilder's motivation to pursue bodybuilding was precipitated by feelings of body-related inadequacy and shame, and, later, sustained by feelings of pride in his muscular development. In addition to this, Klein's (1986, 1987, 1993a) assertion that male bodybuilders present with personalities characterised by pathological narcissism, heterosexism, and authoritarianism, which veil low self-esteem and

⁶⁶ The feminist analysis of male bodybuilders has been more limited compared to the vast body of feminist critique on female bodybuilders (Aoki, 1996; Boyle, 2005; Brace-Govan, 2004; Felkar, 2012; Ian, 2001; Johnstone, 1996; McGrath & Chananie-Hill, 2009; Richardson, 2008; Roussel & Griffet, 2000; Roussel, Griffet, & Duret, 2003; St. Martin & Gavey, 1996).

excessive self-criticism, have also been tested. For example, Drummond (1994, 2002) has found that competitive male bodybuilders can be driven by a desire to dominate other men. In another instance, Rubinstein's (2003) study of Israeli bodybuilders found that while narcissism appeared more prevalent in her sample, no significant homophobic or authoritarian attitudes were evident. Lastly, Denham's (2008) essay on masculinities in hardcore bodybuilding also attested to the presence of narcissist and homophobic attitudes amongst bodybuilders. To this effect, it is evident that empirical support for Klein's thesis has often proven to be selective and, at times, contrary.

In sum, while Klein's work stood as the first definitive account on the subculture of bodybuilding; the gradual rise in scholarship on bodybuilding since Klein's work was published has since come to render his oeuvre a seminal but limited ethnographic account of those Southern Californian male bodybuilders who inhabited the core of the community during the latter days of bodybuilding's "Golden Age". Secondly, Klein's thesis has been criticised for offering a largely one-dimensional representation of male bodybuilders, their bodies, and their muscle-building↔gendering practices. In this regard, the belief that male bodybuilders are all-consumed by gender(ed) neuroses and inadequacies negates the complex motivational systems, ambitions, and desires which prompt bodybuilders to pursue bodybuilding (Monaghan, 1999). In doing so, Klein's analyses sometimes pave over the morphologically diverse muscularities which different male bodybuilders both desire and craft, by rendering the male bodybuilder's body a singular hyper-muscular/masculine body (Monaghan, 1999). Thirdly, Klein's ethnographies primarily focus on those North American, White, and heterosexual men deeply enmeshed in the bodybuilding community in a particular historical time within American political and cultural life. This has meant that Klein's work has often had little to say about how men of different races, sexualities, and regions outside of North America negotiate the experiences and practices of competitive bodybuilding.

2.3.2. Muscle madness: Risk, steroids, and psychopathology.

In both autobiographical and research accounts, the figure of the competitive male bodybuilder has often come to embody the quintessential representation of the health-compromised, artificially-enhanced, and chemically-laden modern athlete (Denham, 2008; Fussell, 1991; Giraldi, 2009; Klein, 1993a; Monaghan, 2001; Probert et al., 2007b; Probert & Leberman, 2009; Solotaroff, 2010). This perception has given rise to swathes of risk-oriented research on competitive male bodybuilders, primarily framed within (Western) medical(ised) models of health/illness, which have often pathologised their competitive practices (Monaghan, 2014). In this regard, four broad dimensions of risk have been reiterated within this body of research, namely: (1) steroid use; (2) over-exercising; (3) extreme dieting; and (4) psychopathological perceptions of body image and muscularity.

On the subject of steroid use, the literature on bodybuilding is unambiguous: virtually all competitive bodybuilders use a poly-pharmaceutical combination of AASs and other PPEs to build competition-standard muscle (Denham, 2008; Klein, 1993a). AAS use by male bodybuilders has been commonly portrayed in the literature as a form of illicit drug abuse, or the consequence of disordered (masculine) body image perceptions, or a practice bound up in male risk-taking behaviour (Keane, 2005). The use of AASs does however not only assist in stimulating muscle hypertrophy, but, also, yields a number of other short, longer-term, and life-long side effects (Pope et al., 2014). The most serious of these are: cardiovascular sequelae in the form of “sudden death, thrombo-embolic disease and cerebro-vascular events” (Lane et al., 2006, p. 483); harmful increases in blood pressure (Lenders et al., 1988); and cardiomyopathy⁶⁷ (Ahlgrim & Guglin, 2009). Research on AAS-using male bodybuilders has

⁶⁷ Subcultural lore is replete with stories of bodybuilders who died at early ages after suffering massive heart-attacks, attributed to their years of AAS use. In 2014, bodybuilder Oli Cooney (20 years old) sustained a fatal heart-attack after developing chronic heart damage attributed to AAS use (Thornhill, 2014). In 2011, Mahmoud Ibrahim Alhdidi (29 years old) died of heart failure during the weigh-in of the Men’s World Amateur Championship, attributed to dehydration (MuscleMag, n.d.). Recent history is also replete with the names of bodybuilders whose heart attacks, cardiovascular difficulties, and cardiac abnormalities, were attributed to

pointed to a range of other harmful side-effects, including: liver damage (Pertusi, Dickerman, & McConathy, 2001); renal disease (Hartung, Gerth, Fünfstück, Gröne, & Stein, 2001); tendon ruptures (Beel, Maycock, & McLean, 1998); arterial blockages (Lane et al., 2006); severe acne (Melnik, Jansen, & Grabbe, 2007); stretchmarks from rapid muscle expansion (Evans, 1997); balding (Perry, Lund, Deninger, Kutscher, & Schneider, 2005); tissue injuries at injecting sites (Fussell, 1991); and infection transmission from syringes (Bolding, Sherr, Maguire, & Elford, 1999; Midgley et al., 2000).

The concurrent use of AASs with PPEs in competitive “stacks” also carries some toxic side-effects. For example, the administration of exogenous insulin has become popular amongst competitive bodybuilders because of its “synergistic” effect in increasing muscle volume and mass (Evans & Lynch, 2003; Rich, Dickinson, Merriman, & Thule, 1998). However, insulin-using competitive bodybuilders may develop insulin-induced hypoglycemia (Evans & Lynch, 2003). Diuretics also possess one of the most infamous reputations. Diuretics are used by competitive bodybuilders to remove excess water and minimise overall body weight, as well as produce a harder-looking and “drier” physique through removal of subcutaneous water (Brainum, 2010). The excessive excretion of water through urination can however leave the body and muscles dehydrated and depleted of essential minerals (Brainum, 2010); commonly resulting in severe muscle cramps, with reports of some bodybuilders having collapsed, experienced convulsions, and died, while on stage⁶⁸.

There has also been sustained academic inquiry into the psychological effects of prolonged AAS use by bodybuilders (Kanayama, Brower, Wood, Hudson, & Pope, 2009;

AAS use: Mike Mentzer (died at age 49), Art Atwood (38), Don Youngblood (51), Andreas Muenzer (31), Robert Benavente (30), Charles Durr (44), Eduardo Kawak (47), and Mike Matarazzo (39), to name only a notable few.

⁶⁸ In 1988, “pro” bodybuilder Albert Beckles collapsed and began convulsing on stage as a result of diuretic-induced dehydration. In 1991, Andy Rody, an amateur competitive bodybuilder, died on stage due to an overdose of diuretics. In 1992, after winning the Belgian Grand Prix, Mohammed Benaziza (33 years old) suffered cardiac arrest related to his use of diuretics. In 1994, while posing at the Arnold Classic, bodybuilder Paull Dillet’s muscles cramped so severely that he became rigid and unable to move. Although still alive, Dillet’s rigamortified body had to be carried off the stage by four Stagehands. Dillet’s use of an injectable diuretic known as Lasix (See Appendix F) resulted in extreme dehydration and his on-stage “petrification”.

Kouvelas, 2006; Lefavi, Reeve, & Newland, 1990; Pope & Katz, 1988; Pope, Kouri, & Hudson, 2000; Pope, Kouri, Powell, Campbell, & Katz, 1996). A cornerstone of this research has been to test the hypothesis of a causal link between AASs and violent behaviour (Pope & Katz, 1988). Amongst AAS-using bodybuilders the term “roid rage” has emerged to describe aggressive changes in bodybuilders’ moods (Rutstein, 2005). Denham (2008) has also described this as “steroid psychosis”⁶⁹ (p. 236). Studies have found psychological alterations amongst AAS-using male bodybuilders, including: more frequent episodes of anger (Lefavi et al., 1990); increased hostility (Moss, Panzak, & Tartar, 1992); and changes in mood (Perry et al., 2005). Interestingly, Olrich (1999) reports that male bodybuilders run the risk of becoming dependent on AASs out of a desire to maintain gains in muscle mass and avoid muscle atrophy. Similarly, some bodybuilders have reported experiences of depression when having to discontinue AAS use after competing (Probert & Leberman, 2009).

Over-exercising is the second dimension of risk highlighted amongst competitive male bodybuilders. It is well documented in autobiographical accounts (Fussell, 1994), empirical research (Alway, Grumbt, Stray-Gundersen, & Gonyea, 1994; Probert et al., 2007a; Siewe et al., 2014), and subcultural documentation (Darden, 2004; Hatfield, 1984; Kennedy, 2008; Pense, 2012), that competitive bodybuilders can expend a substantial number of hours in the gym each day. Andrews et al. (2005) found some bodybuilders spend up to 24 hours a week in the gym; while some are known to sacrifice relationships and social lives (Probert & Leberman, 2009) as well as employment opportunities (Klein, 1993a) to spend more time in the gym. After having resigned from his job to pursue his affair with iron fulltime, Fussell (1991) opined: “I hardly thought of myself as jobless ... Now I was a workaholic who devoted every hour of the day, one way or another, to the gym” (p. 81).

⁶⁹ There a number of subcultural horror stories concerning “roid rage”. One notable tragedy was that of amateur competitive bodybuilder Gordon Kimbrough who, in 1993, stabbed and strangled his girlfriend in a fit of so-called “roid rage”, which he later claimed was the result of prolonged AAS use (New York Times, 1993).

Interestingly, competitive bodybuilders' exercise habits have been varyingly described as a "commitment" (Scott-Robertson, 1996), an "addiction" (Seheult, 1995), a "dependence" (Smith, Hale, & Collins, 1998), and a "disease" (Fussell, 1991). Fussell (1991) describes the symptoms of this "disease" as "a complete commitment to all matters pertaining to iron" (p. 19). Smith et al. (1998) has gone so far as to find empirical support for a Bodybuilding Dependence Scale. Bodybuilders also report frustration and guilt when they are required to deviate from their workout schedules or miss a training session (Probert et al., 2007a). This could be due to the immediate influence training has on a bodybuilder's perception and feeling of their physical size and muscular development (Petersen, 2005).

The recurrent physiological stresses of resistance training with heavy loads of weight means that competitive bodybuilders' bodies sustain regular musculo-skeletal injuries (Green & Comfort, 2008), including, tears in muscle tissue, bone fractures, and ruptures to tendons and ligaments (Kennedy, 2008; Lavallee & Balam, 2010). In the long run, competitive bodybuilders often develop "arthritis of the major joints related to the repeated stresses placed upon ... joints during training and competition over years and even decades" (Lavallee & Balam, 2010, pp. 310-311).

The third dimension of risk recurrently highlighted in research with competitive male bodybuilders is extreme dieting. The drastic dietary manipulations a competitive bodybuilder must subject their body to in moving from their off-season to the competitive season has been shown to effect their very molecular biology and body composition (Hickson, Johnson, Lee, & Sidor, 1990; Mangweth et al., 2001; Manz et al., 1995; Too, Wakayama, Locati, & Landwer, 1998); with nutritional (Kleiner, Bazzarre, & Litchford, 1990) and psychological risks (Andersen, Barlett, Morgan, & Brownell, 1995; Newton, Hunter, Bammon, & Roney, 1993). In studying the pre-contest period for a bodybuilder, Hickson et al. (1990) found that blood chemistry analyses revealed abnormalities in hemoconcentration which increased

blood viscosity and placed the bodybuilder at risk for a thromboembolic event. Bodybuilders also experience extreme fluctuations in their overall levels bodyfat through cycles of chronic dieting (Too et al., 1998). For example, during a 10-week pre-competition diet, Too et al. (1998) measured a weight loss from 76.3 kg (16% bodyfat) to 63.4 kg (4.4% bodyfat) for a competitive bodybuilder.

On a nutritional level, Kleiner et al. (1990) found that male bodybuilders consumed three times the recommended dietary allowance (RDA) of proteins and 70% or more of the RDA for most nutrients, in order to fuel their muscle growth. In one study, a competitive bodybuilder was found to have a 2100% increase in the RDA of micronutrients (Manore, Thompson, & Russo, 1993). These findings do however stand at odds with the harsh nutrient deficiencies competitive bodybuilders are also known to experience in the days leading up to their contests in efforts to lower bodyfat levels and remain lean (Kitchen, n.d.).

On a psychological level, competitive bodybuilders' eating habits have been likened to clinical eating disorders (Goldfield, 2009; Goldfield, Harper, & Blouin, 1998; Marzano-Parisoli, 2001). Some bodybuilders have been found to engage in binge-eating behaviour (Andersen et al., 1995; Probert et al., 2007b), and meet the criteria for "bulimia nervosa" (Goldfield, Blouin, & Woodside, 2006). Elements of the restricted eating habits akin to "anorexia nervosa" has also been found in the way some bodybuilders approach the cutting phase of their competitive dieting as they attempt to eviscerate bodyfat (Goldfield, Harper, & Blouin, 1998). Given the utilitarian significance of food and nutrients in fueling muscle growth and manipulating body composition (Monaghan, 2001); it is not unusual for Andersen et al. (1995) to have found that 81% of their sample of competitive bodybuilders reported being constantly preoccupied with thoughts about food. It is well-known that as competitive bodybuilders enforce an ever-more austere diet closer to their contests, the emotional rigors

of dieting as well as dehydration and nutrient deficiency can result in fatigue and confusion (Newton et al., 1993) as well as physical and emotional exhaustion (Gordon, 2005).

Interestingly, competitive male bodybuilders' use of steroids, over-exercising, and extreme dieting, have however become increasingly seen as behavioural symptoms of potential body image disturbances⁷⁰, namely, “muscle dysmorphia”, the fourth form of risk. Pope, Gruber, Choi, Olivardia, and Phillips (1997) first identified “muscle dysmorphia” as condition of those “pathologically preoccupied with their degree of muscularity” (p. 548), and developed a set of diagnostic criteria⁷¹. According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-V*, “muscle dysmorphia” describes “an individual [who] is preoccupied with the idea that his or her body build is too small or insufficiently muscular” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 243).

Successive studies on “muscle dysmorphia” have used male bodybuilders as research samples because of their concerted orientation to the development and aesthetics of muscle size and definition⁷² (Esco, Olson, & Williford, 2005). Although Olivardia (2001) has reiterated that “muscle dysmorphia” is not an attempt to pathologise competitive bodybuilders; Mosley (2009) has nonetheless observed: “As the prime motivation of bodybuilding is to become bigger and leaner, one must wonder if it is possible to distinguish between a healthy enthusiasm for bodybuilding and muscle dysmorphia given that the underlying rationale for both is the same” (p. 197). Empirically, competitive male

⁷⁰ It is worth noting that studies of competitive male bodybuilders have found that they report greater degrees of body image dissatisfaction (Blouin & Goldfield, 1995) as well as significant body image satisfaction (Finkenberg & Teper, 1991).

⁷¹ See Appendix H for the originally formulated diagnostic criteria.

⁷² Male bodybuilders have not just featured in research on “muscle dysmorphia” (Pope et al., 1997), but, also, in a number of other mental health conditions which have emerged in clinical (and popular) parlance to characterise an obsession with muscular development, including: “reverse anorexia” (Pope, Katz, Hudson, 1993); “megorexia” (Kessler, 1998); “bigorexia” (Mosely, 2009); “orthorexia” (Kitchen, n.d.); and “the Adonis complex” (Pope et al., 2000).

bodybuilders are more likely to present with symptoms of “muscle dysmorphia”⁷³ (Lantz, Rhea, & Cornelius, 2002), but, on the contrary, not to be more “muscle dysmorphic” than ordinary weight trainers (Pickett, Lewis, & Cash, 2005).

In sum, clinically-oriented medical(ised) risk research, has tended to paint competitive male bodybuilders homogenously with a single pathological brush and, in some instances, with particular caution placed on the sexual and gendered “risks” entailed in their competitive lifestyles and practices (Vertinsky, 1999). For example, male bodybuilders have been warned against the “feminising” effects of AAS use which can cause gynecomastia (Kicman, 2008) and testicular atrophy (Hartgens & Kuipers, 2004). From a critical social science perspective, this body of risk research has yielded some methodological limitations, including: (1) the use of quantitative questionnaires which solely screen for dysfunction, such as, in diagnostic psychometrics and symptom checklists; and (2) inconsistency amongst studies in determining what constitutes a “competitive bodybuilder” – which has meant that regular gym-goers, recreational bodybuilders, one-time competitors, and “pro” bodybuilders have been included in, excluded from, and mixed into samples designated as “competitive bodybuilders”.

Unlike the medical(ised) risk-oriented research on male bodybuilders, researchers like Probert (Probert et al., 2007b; Probert & Leberman, 2009) and Monaghan (1999, 2001, 2002, 2006; Monaghan et al., 2000) have used qualitative approaches to study the construction of risk by competitive male bodybuilders and have found that they are not necessarily reckless risk-takers. The use of ethnographic (in Monaghan’s work) and phenomenological (in Probert’s work) techniques, with in-depth interviewing, has yielded far more nuanced accounts of male bodybuilders’ construction of risk in relation to their competitive identities, lives, and practices. For Monaghan (2001), competitive bodybuilders adopt a subculturally informed “calculative orientation to risk behaviour” (p. 94) which is, in their minds,

⁷³ It is worth noting that there remains ongoing clinical debate over the diagnostic indicators of “muscle dysmorphia” (Tod, Edwards, & Cranswick, 2016).

scientifically considered. In addition, phenomenological research has shown how competitive bodybuilders employ positive and rewarding interpretations of seemingly pejorative and health-compromising competitive practices (Probert et al., 2007b; Probert & Leberman, 2009). This work suggests that competitive bodybuilders' perceptions of health and illness, and what competitive muscle-building practices constitute risky behaviours, are defined by an always shifting and highly subjective fine-line (Probert et al., 2007b).

2.3.3. Bodybuilding identity/ies: The influence of postmodernist, phenomenological, and Queer perspectives.

The third body of scholarship on men's competitive bodybuilding largely emerged as Klein's academic output on the subject began to wane in the mid-1990s. Moving out of Klein's shadow, more postmodern, phenomenological, and Queer oriented studies began to broaden and deepen critical work on competitive bodybuilding/ers in four distinct ways. First, much of this work signaled a methodological shift from the Kleinian mode of ethnographic critique to a more phenomenological orientation with intensive interviewing. Second, under the influence of postmodernist theorisations of identity, embodiment, and body work, a more expansive view of male bodybuilders was taken by studies that conceptually connected their muscular development to dimensions of embodied identity which, besides gender, had remained underdeveloped within critical bodybuilding scholarship, such as: age (Phoenix, 2010); race (Sparkes, Batey, & Brown, 2005; Sparkes, Batey, & Owen, 2012); class (Probert, 2009); and sexuality (Probert, 2009). Third, these analyses of male bodybuilders' competitive muscle-building practices adopted a less pejorative tone which distanced itself from the pathologising tenor of Kleinian and medical(ised) risk-orientated research. Lastly, the study of male bodybuilders' embodied identities and practices became increasingly attuned to the

influence of key subcultural spaces, such as, the gym, on their physical and subcultural development.

One of the first scholars to spearhead this shift within academic literature on bodybuilding was Lee Monaghan (1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2006). As a point of departure, Monaghan (2001) argued that (gender or masculine) inadequacy was “neither a necessary nor sufficient condition” (p. 10) for fully understanding the multifaceted, complex, and shifting systems of meanings which informed male bodybuilders’ commitment to muscular development. Informed by Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of taste, Monaghan argued that male bodybuilders acquired a situated “*ethnophysiological appreciation*” (1999, p. 278, emphasis original) for muscular development and muscular aesthetics which “emerge[d] during ... [o]ngoing practical involvement in the bodybuilding habitus” (2001, p. 75).

To this effect, Monaghan’s (2001) theory deviated from the Kleinian and early feminist thesis that male bodybuilders were simply driven by “a ‘knee-jerk’ response to psychosocial forces and a wish to embody hegemonic masculinity” (p. 75, quotations original). Monaghan (2001) contended that “bodybuilders’ learnt ways of looking *at* bodies inform[ed] *their* decision to approximate the look of a particular soma type and thus *their willingness* to commit themselves to bodybuilding over time” (p. 75, emphases original). In this regard, Monaghan (1999) dispelled the perception that all male bodybuilders’ bodies were muscularly monolithic; in fact, Monaghan (1999) outlined a heterogeneous typology of muscularities marked by significant morphological diversity in the mass, size, “rippedness”, and symmetry that a male bodybuilder would ultimately desire and seek to build.

In a similar vein, Probert’s (2009; Probert et al., 2007a; Probert et al., 2007b; Probert & Leberman, 2009) phenomenological research also sought to dispute scholarship which portrayed “bodybuilder identities as essentially uni-dimensional” (p. 7). For Probert et al. (2007a), bodybuilding carries multiple meanings for its participants, including, as “a form of

self-enhancement, way of life, an extension of ... healthy-balanced self, a means to look good, a form of body manipulation, as well as an extreme competitive sport” (p. 23). To this effect, Probert’s (2007a; 2009) work has helped to reframe bodybuilding as an affirmative project for male bodybuilders’ identities, as opposed to a symptom of personal inadequacy or psychological disturbance.

Of significant conceptual influence within this approach has been the late/high/post-modernist work of Anthony Giddens (1991) on “reflexive project[s] of the self” (p. 185) and that of Chris Shilling (1993) on “body project[s]” (p. 5). For example, in work on male bodybuilders, Thomson (1996) has remarked that they “perform themselves and become their own projects ... embodying postmodern selfhood” (p. 17); Keane (2009) has contended that bodybuilding offers a “project of self-formation” (p. 179); and Brown (1999) has observed that being a bodybuilder is a “self-reflexive body project” (p. 83). Interestingly, the idea that bodybuilding marks “the ultimate expression of a postmodern belief in corporeal malleability” (Moore, 1997, p. 2), carries resonance in bodybuilding’s very own subcultural rhetoric on personal development through deliberative body modification (Heywood, 1998).

Phoenix (2010), in an autophotographic study of competitive bodybuilders (aged 56–73), proposed that male bodybuilders can be thought of as “reflexive body-subjects” (p. 168) whose participation in competitive muscle-building allowed them an active sense of masculinity which resisted the conventional discourses of passivity in aging. Monaghan (2001) has also suggested that bodybuilders’ development of their muscularity was significantly circumscribed by their phase of life. Adopting a life course perspective with 32 male bodybuilders, Bailey and Gillett (2012) found that constructions of masculinity, male body image, and discourses of health, were significantly intertwined in how they envisioned their muscularities. Bailey and Gillett (2012) uncovered that younger men desired a muscular

body which connoted virility and athleticism; middle-aged men sought to avoid the adulthood paunch; while older men believed that bodybuilding positively fostered greater self-reliance.

Racial and ethnic identity has received comparatively little critical attention in men's bodybuilding scholarship⁷⁴ (Probert, 2009). Discourses on race, ethnicity, and genetic predispositions for muscle growth are often blurred in competitive bodybuilding (Heywood, 1998). Bodybuilders consider some ethnicities to be more genetically-gifted than others in muscle development (Fussell, 1991). It has also been noted that, in men's competitive bodybuilding, the "social meaning of muscle and masculinity are infused by issues relating to race, ethnicity, social class and national identity" (Sparkes et al., 2005, p. 152). To this effect, in their life history study of a Black male bodybuilder, Sparkes et al. (2005, 2012) found that a bodybuilder's ethnic identity, as "African", was displaced by their "British" national identity when he achieved competitive success on a national stage.

In terms of class identity and status, Klein (1993a) found that male bodybuilders typically came from working-class backgrounds with minimal education and often pursued temporary or manual work. More recently, Probert (2009) found that contemporary bodybuilders come from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds and hold various forms of employment including professional work. Wacquant (1995) has suggested that social class insecurities may motivate some men to pursue bodybuilding; while Probert (2009) has found that bodybuilders' levels of financial investment in their muscular development and body image enhanced their perceptions of their own class identity and status.

Since the time of Eugen Sandow, male bodybuilders' have had their (hetero)sexuality questioned⁷⁵ (Stokvis, 2006; Vertinsky, 1999; Richardson, 2012). In Probert's (2009) phenomenological research, an openly gay bodybuilder found that his identity as a

⁷⁴ But there are some notable contributions on race in women's bodybuilding by Balsamo (1996), Boyle (2003, 2005), Frueh (1999), Heywood (1998), and Holmlund (1989, 1997).

⁷⁵ In an early commentary on bodybuilding, Walters (1978) even argued that men's bodybuilding served as vehicle for its participants and audiences to satiate homoerotic and voyeuristic desires.

bodybuilder often displaced his sexuality, providing him opportunities for acceptance amongst heterosexual competitors⁷⁶. Drummond (1994, 2002) as well as Monaghan, Bloor, Dobash, and Dobash (1998) found that a desire to enhance sexual attractiveness can factor into male bodybuilders' pursuit of muscular development. However, Richardson (2012) found that some male bodybuilders reject conventional standards of sexual attractiveness and pursue muscularities, such as, the subculturally peculiar "freak aesthetic", which are not informed by socially normative ideas of sexual attractiveness.

Interestingly, recent work on sexuality within bodybuilding has also helped to further understand how men's competitive bodybuilding "destabilizes [binarised] gender semiotics" (Richardson, 2004, p. 63). For example, competitive physique preparation for male bodybuilders is replete with practices associated with predominantly Western ideas of so-called "femininity", including: strict dieting to control bodyfat, shaving to remove body hair, the application of make-up to the body, and a heightened degree of consciousness about the appearance of the body (Obel, 1996; Staszal, 2009). In addition, the competitive practice of posing on stage unwittingly places the male bodybuilder in the traditionally "feminine" position of becoming a "sexualized object" (Vertinsky, 1999, p. 8).

Developing these insights even further, Queer-inflected (Parsi, 1997; Richardson, 2004; Schippert, 2007) and freak theory studies (Lindsay, 1996; Liokaftos, 2012; Richardson, 2012; Sparkes, Brighton, & Inckle, 2018; Staszal, 2009) with male bodybuilders have shown that their hyper-muscular physiques possess a symbolically subversive potential. For such scholars, the male bodybuilder's fat-emaciated and ultra-muscular physique disrupts the heteronormative system of sexed/gendered signifiers that traditionally demarcate biologically male and female bodies (Bolin, 1997; Locks, 2012b; Parsi, 1997; Richardson, 2004; Saltman,

⁷⁶ However, Bob Paris (1998), one of only a handful of internationally known and openly gay professional bodybuilders, testified that publicly disclosing his sexuality resulted in discrimination from fellow bodybuilders, and negatively affected his professional career.

1998; Schippert, 2007). In an example of this, Richardson quotes well-known IFBB “pro” bodybuilder Mike Matarazzo’s description of the “huge gobs of sickening, twisted muscle” (Matarazzo, 1992, as cited in Richardson, 2012, p. 181) which constitute his physique. For Richardson (2012), those contemporary male bodybuilders who, like Matarazzo, develop freakishly muscular physiques (un)knowingly make a “subversive comment on idealized masculinity ... [through] a rejection of traditional ideas of attractiveness” (p. 189).

Coupled to much of the aforementioned work on bodybuilders’ identities has also been a more nuanced examination of the roles played by their physical, social, and subcultural emplacement within the gym – a space that Andrews et al. (2005) have described as the primary “node of bodybuilding” (p. 888). Interestingly, early studies on bodybuilding had found that different kinds of gyms presented different opportunities and challenges for male bodybuilders, their bodies, and their muscle-building practices (Bednarek, 1985). Mansfield and McGinn (1993) found that commercial gyms discouraged the membership of male bodybuilders “by the deliberate exclusion of certain aspects of the technology” (p. 51) and equipment needed for substantial muscular development.

Despite the obstacles sometimes presented by more mainstream gyms, Andrews et al. (2005) have nonetheless noted that gyms still provide bodybuilders with a pivotal space in which “to talk about bodybuilding with other bodybuilders, gain experiences, inspiration, learn from them and importantly maintain their own identity” (p. 889). Within the social relations of the gym, bodybuilders learn to embody particular bodily comportments and forms of behavioural etiquette which are unique and essential for recognition and acceptance as a bodybuilder and, in turn, help to encode (often gendered) relations of inclusion, exclusion, and power between bodybuilders and non-bodybuilders (Andrews et al., 2005).

In this regard, Andrews et al. (2005) specifically observed how male bodybuilders often used their physical size to enact a “ ‘biggest is best’ pecking order [in the gym],

whereby larger men overtly intimidated smaller men” (p. 884, quotations original). Amongst bodybuilders themselves, Smith and Stewart (2012) noted how relations of dominance play out in the gym through a situated dynamic where “[b]icep size served as a proxy for [subcultural expertise and] knowledge” (p. 979). However, while the gym may function as a unique social site which often affirms male bodybuilders and their muscular development (Klein,1993a); it also comes to act as a safe, if not insular, subcultural space. In this regard, Bridges (2009) found that the peculiar forms of “masculine gender capital” (p. 93) that were attached to male bodybuilders’ muscular physiques were “contextually contingent” (p. 84) to specific subcultural niches, such as, the gym, and dissipated when exiting these spaces.

In sum, the influence of postmodernist, phenomenological, and Queer work has helped to expand and deepen the broader range of “embodied meanings” (Monaghan, 2014, p. 17) that male bodybuilders attach to their muscle as well as the competitive practices which build and gender their muscle. Today, work on competitive male bodybuilders recognises that they are more than a homogenous mob of “muscle heads” (Bardick, Bernes & Nixon, 2006, p. 141) and that their commitment to muscular development is not merely informed by masculine inadequacies, but, rather, also intertwines with how they negotiate different aspects of their identities, such as, age, race, class, and sexuality. In doing so, this body of work has rendered an understanding of male bodybuilders’ muscle-building practices as not just simply reactionary and recuperative (of gender power), but, also, as a rewarding (and potentially Queer) project of self-development. Finally, the attention to the ways in which male bodybuilders’ peculiar identities and bodies are developed within particular subcultural sites, such as, the gym, has been crucial in highlighting how “the gym and bodybuilding culture are co-dependent and coproduced” (Andrews et al., 2005, p. 888) and, in particular, how the gym can function as a unique social space in which bodybuilders become acculturated into the bodily and embodied codes of bodybuilding.

2.3.4. A fleshier paradigm: The sensuality/ies and materiality/ies of muscle.

The final body of scholarship on competitive male bodybuilders is not a unitary body of literature, but, rather, a small and disparate set of contributions which have drawn more focused attention to male bodybuilder's bodies and, in particular, their muscle by, on one hand, exploring the bodily sensualities that bodybuilders experience in the throes of building muscle, and, on the other hand, critically examining the ways in which the materiality/ies of bodybuilders' bodies are (re)built and (re)shaped through their competitive practices.

The sensual materialities of building muscle in bodybuilding were probably best brought to light by then 28-year-old Arnold Schwarzenegger when, while being interviewed in the docu-film *Pumping Iron*, he described the erotic experience of “the pump”⁷⁷:

The most satisfying feeling you can get in the gym is *the pump*. Let's say you train your biceps: blood is rushing into your muscles and that's what we call *the pump*. Your muscles get a really tight feeling, like your skin is going to explode any minute ... it feels fantastic. It's as satisfying to me as *coming* is, you know, as having sex with a woman and *coming* (Butler et al., 1977, emphasis added).

Interestingly, while the corporeal carnality of “the pump” may appear purely hedonistic, it in fact comes to serve an important functional value to the bodybuilder when immersed in training. For example, Schwarzenegger and Hall (1977) advised bodybuilders to use “the pump” to, in their words, “tune” (p. 159) their bodies into always more effective modes of training. While bodybuilders' references to “the pump” would become synonymous with the ways they experienced the sensually heady mixture of pain and pleasure entailed in their arduous routines of weight training (Staszal, 2009); Wiegers (1998) research with male bodybuilders would add greater light on the complex systems of sensation recognition that bodybuilders developed in understanding pain: “they liked, desired and sought out the burn, a

⁷⁷ According to Andrews et al. (2005), “the pump” describes a feeling where a bodybuilder's “muscles have been worked so hard, and are so filled with blood that it gives a tight sensation, a feeling of hardness and added size” (p. 881). Heywood (2012) has also described this sensation as an “incredible rush” (p. 122).

stimulating reaction that was considered vital to successful bodybuilding” (p. 158), but typically avoided “bad pain” (p. 158) which signaled injury.

Interestingly, some of this work has also explored the gendered ways male bodybuilders experience the sensual qualities of their muscle. Of specific focus here has been the way male bodybuilders desire the sensual and tactile experience of hardness in muscle and, by extension, how bodybuilding (re)produces the male body in phallocentric ways. According to Grosz (1994) making muscle hard is intimately connected to the ways male bodybuilders attempt to “render the whole of the male body into the phallus, creating the male body as hard, impenetrable, pure muscle” (p. 224).

Apart from exploring male bodybuilders’ sensual experiences of muscle; authors like Pamela Moore (1997) have called for more “[f]leshy paradigms” (p. 3) through which to theorise bodybuilders, their bodies, and their bodybuilding practices. In the opening pages of her anthology, *Building Bodies*, Moore (1997) contends that bodybuilding scholarship often bypasses the materiality/ies of bodybuilders’ bodies in favour of producing more academically attractive analyses which focus on their subjectivities and subjectification within bodybuilding subculture. For Moore (1997), theoretical and empirical interventions which return the blood, bones, and tissue to work on bodybuilders is increasingly required to arrest the influence of overly discursivised analyses which evacuate the materiality of flesh.

In making her argument, Moore (1997) highlights how much of the critical work on bodybuilders’ gendered subjectivities/subjectification has all too often focused on the way subcultural constructions and discursive inscriptions of gender operate on their muscular physiques and, in so doing, render their material bodies nothing more than “passive victims of ... social forces” (p. 4). In correcting this, however, Moore (1997) does not argue to abandon constructionist or discursively attuned analyses, but, rather, to couple these insights

to bodybuilders' material bodies, or, in her words, to theorise the bodybuilder's muscular body as "a dynamic, politicized *and* biological site" (p. 2, emphases original).

Similarly, Nancy Tuana (1996) argues, in her essay *Fleshing Gender, Sexing the Body*, that muscles are "not simply marked [by subcultural signifiers of sex/gender], they are *grown*" (p. 59, emphasis added) in ways which aim to embody the competitively circumscribed and gendered aesthetic criteria within men's bodybuilding. To this effect, Tuana (1996) argues in favour of retheorising the male bodybuilder, their body, and their competitive practices as both "material-semiotic" (p. 54), that is, through a lens which "refuse[s] dichotomization" (p. 62), by thinking together the old analytical binaries of nature/culture, sex/gender, and material/discursive. In doing so, Tuana (1996) contends that it becomes increasingly possible to see the ways a bodybuilder's "body has a say" (p. 60) in the competitive practices through which it is developed and gendered for the competitive stage.

In sum, while the aforementioned work has helped to uncover the sensual and material dimensions of bodybuilders' bodies and muscle and, in so doing, marked a much needed "return to the flesh" (Tuana, 1996, p. 56) within bodybuilding scholarship; such a turn cannot be underpinned by modes of analysis which reify the male bodybuilder's material body and muscle, in Moore's (1997) words, as "passive flesh" (p. 2). Such an approach would (either explicitly or implicitly) only serve to reinscribe the competitive male bodybuilder, their body, and their competitive practices through Western, patriarchal, and humanocentric tropes which reinstate the male bodybuilder as a self-contained and Cartesian subject whose muscle is nothing more than an object for self-determined manipulation and whose muscle-building↔gendering practices function in completely self-directed ways. It is, in this regard, that new modes of theorising the dynamic materialities and active participation of muscle in competitive male bodybuilders' muscle-building↔gendering practices, are now required.

2.4. The matter of muscle in men's competitive bodybuilding: A summary.

In this chapter I sought to offer a critical tour of the men and muscle which inhabit the world of men's competitive bodybuilding. To this end I divided the chapter into three sections. In the first section, I traced the largely Western centered development of the what is today the dominant community of men's organised competitive bodybuilding. In doing so, I followed the aesthetic and morphological evolution of those muscular male physiques first desired, built, and commercialised by the early (proto)bodybuilders, such as, Eugen Sandow, at the dawn of the twentieth century; too today's excessively muscular "freak aesthetic" (Hotten, 2004) within men's competitive bodybuilding. In this regard, particular attention was given to the influence of the IFBB, the most subculturally dominant competitive bodybuilding federation, in determining the dominant competitive aesthetics within the men's competitive bodybuilding around the world. Although, more recently, organisations like the IFBB have moved to introduce new competitive divisions for male bodybuilders which turn away from the exaggerated muscle mass and size of the "freak aesthetic", such as, in the form of "men's classic bodybuilding" and the so-called "classic aesthetic"; the subcultural capital and dominance of muscular freakery and freakishness amongst male bodybuilders remains largely hegemonic within the competitive community (Liokaftos, 2012; Staszal, 2009).

In the second section, I specifically focused on the development of men's competitive bodybuilding within the unique political, social, and cultural milieu of South Africa. It is, within this context, that the historical and contemporary directions (and challenges) of men's competitive bodybuilding as well as the bodies of South African competitive male bodybuilders cannot be abstracted from the structural oppressions and deep divisions which have come to characterise South Africa's historical development, especially along the axes of sex/gender and, foremostly, race. In this regard, I specifically highlighted the influence of

(the IFBB-affiliated) BBSA, the most subculturally dominant and competitively popular bodybuilding organisation in South Africa.

In the third section, I reviewed the theoretical and empirical “bodies” of research on competitive male bodybuilders, their muscle, and their muscle-building↔gendering practices. First, I examined the seminal ethnographic work of Alan Klein and the early feminist critique of male bodybuilders which has helped to yield important insights into the psychological and social gender(ed) dynamics that sometimes underpin male bodybuilder’s motivation to build muscle. Second, I considered a sizeable body of research which adopts a predominantly medical(ised) approach to studying the physical, psychological, and gendered risks entailed in male bodybuilder’s competitive lifestyles and practices. Third, I outlined a theoretically diverse body of scholarship drawing from postmodernist perspectives on body modification, phenomenological approaches to identity and embodiment, as well as Queer and freak theory on the subversive and transgressive potential of non-normative bodies and body work, which have together broadened and deepened the embodied and emplaced dimensions that diversely inform competitive male bodybuilders’ pursuit of, and commitment to, muscular development.

At this juncture, however, it is important to note how male bodybuilders, their muscle, and their muscle-building↔gendering practices have been theoretically conceived in the aforementioned scholarship as: (1) the effect of personal inadequacy or masculine insecurity; (2) the product of pathologised perceptions in male body image; or (3) the object of embodied and situated identity work or subcultural subjectification. Within these approaches, the focus of empirical attention has often become the psychological or subcultural forces of gender(ed/ing) of discourse and subjectivity in bodybuilding; while the muscular body of the competitive male bodybuilder is rendered as analytically secondary and, in turn, a largely passive mass of flesh. It is my contention that such approaches have had the effect of

theoretically foreclosing the competitive male bodybuilder to the material agencies of their own muscle as well as their more-than-human world(s) which, together, actively co-participate in building their bodies for competition – and often in ways not always determined or desired by the competitive bodybuilder or the subculture of competitive bodybuilding.

It is, in this regard, that the fourth body of work outlined in this literature review moves towards crafting a new theoretical direction for bodybuilding scholarship. Not only does this work explicitly focus on male bodybuilders' bodies by exploring the fleshy sensuality and material palpability of their muscle and muscle-building↔gendering practices, but, moreover, it does so in a way far more analytically attentive to the dynamic material agency of their bodies and muscle, as well as those more-than-human materialities which come to co-constitute their flesh by means of the practices that (re)build and (re)shape their muscle for competitive participation.

It is, for the purpose of this study, that it becomes particularly useful to consider the value of conceptually (re)crafting a more capacious, that is, less humanocentric rendering of competitive male bodybuilders which is more attuned to the material agencies and relations which co-participate in competitively building and gendering their muscle, in ways which are material and, simultaneously, discursive. To this effect, in the following chapter, I introduce the feminist-inflected and posthumanist theoretical tool of trans-corporeality in an attempt to forge what I propose is a new conceptual and empirical trajectory for critical social science work on competitive male bodybuilders, their muscle, and their muscle-building↔gendering practices.

“[F]lesh is no longer flesh”

- Pamela Moore draws attention to the ways in which the competitive practices entailed in bodybuilding ultimately transform and transmogrify the very materiality/ies of the bodybuilder's body, in the opening essay of her edited collection *Building Bodies* (1997, p. 2).

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICALLY BUILDING A TRANS-CORPOREAL BODY

In this chapter I outline the theories and theoretical framework orientating this research into how the trans-corporeal relations between South African competitive male bodybuilders and their more-than-human world(s) actively co-participate in materialising and gendering their muscle. In doing so, this chapter aims to both locate and develop the theoretical underpinnings of this study. The chapter is comprised of a single section which elaborates the theoretical framework for this study, followed by a concluding second section.

This study is theoretically framed and oriented by Stacy Alaimo's trans-corporeality. As a posthumanist mode of theorising, trans-corporeality takes as its point of departure an exploration of the "material interconnections between the human and the more-than-human world" (Alaimo, 2010a, p. 2). In this regard, Alaimo's trans-corporeality sheds the conceptual skin of "the impermeable Western human subject" (2016a, p. 11) by trans-fusing/figuring/mogrifying "Him" through/with/across an "emergent, more-than-human world" (2009a, p. 9): forging what Alaimo (2010a) calls her "trans-corporeal subject" (p. 17).

In developing trans-corporeality for this study, I begin by tracing the corporeal contours of the patriarchal, Cartesian, and Western Hu/Man(ist) subject, which trans-corporeality contests. Following this, I briefly overview the field of feminist-inflected critical posthumanist work to which Alaimo's trans-corporeality is born and allied. Lastly, I explore Alaimo's theorisation of trans-corporeality and, in particular, two concepts which feature in my use of her trans-corporeal subject, namely: (1) intra-activity; and (2) affect.

In sum, I propose that trans-corporeality both extends and broadens existing scholarship on competitive male bodybuilders by theoretically building a feminist posthumanist account not predicated on old humanocentric biases, but, rather, on a recognition of the complex web of more-than-human material agencies which actively co-participate in materialising and gendering the muscle of competitive male bodybuilders.

3.1. Building a more-than↔human body: Stacy Alaimo's trans-corporeality.

The theoretical framework guiding the methodological and analytical approach of this study is provided by Stacy Alaimo's (2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2018a, 2018b) extensive work on her concept of trans-corporeality.

Introduced by Alaimo in her 2008 essay, *Trans-corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature*, trans-corporality underscores how "human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from "nature" or "environment." " (p. 238, quotations original). Whilst a product of Alaimo's long standing critique of the patriarchal and Cartesian logics which circumscribe the dichotomous and hierarchical organisation of "Culture" as a separate and superior sphere of life to "Nature", in Western thought⁷⁸; trans-corporeality was conceptually born from the pulling together of emerging trajectories of environmental, new material, and feminist modes of posthumanist theorising in an effort to "rethink nature, corporeality, and materiality ... as agential, emergent, and intertwined with whatever it is we [humans] have been demarcating as exceptionally human or cultural" (Alaimo, 2016b, p. 544).

In this regard, trans-corporeality has received some of its most significant conceptual attention and development as a trans-disciplinary site of eco-theorising "where corporeal theories and environmental theories meet and mingle in productive ways"⁷⁹ (Alaimo, 2008, p. 238). Throughout much of this work, trans-corporeality has been used as an eco-material tool to analytically trace the "material interchanges across human bodies, animal bodies, and the wider material world" (Alaimo, 2016a, p. 112). For example, when "[i]magining human

⁷⁸ In Alaimo's (2000) book, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space*, she details the pernicious ways in which the trans-historical durability of Culture/Nature dualisms organise Western thought into a series of gendered binaries, including, human/animal, mind/body, subject/object, and agent/resource.

⁷⁹ Trans-corporeality has found significant resonance throughout the politically allied fields of: environmental justice and health (Scott, 2015); material eco-criticism (Sörmus, 2014); the environmental/green/blue humanities (Masami, 2017); critical theorisations of climate change (Neimanis & Walker, 2014); and environmental/elemental/material (eco-)feminisms (Neimanis, 2017).

corporeality as trans-corporeality” (Alaimo, 2010a, p. 2) attention is drawn to how the toxic materialities of our increasingly acidified oceans (Gattuso & Hansson, 2011), polluted atmospheres (Jacobson, 2002), poisoned rivers (Agarwal, 2009), tainted soils (Mirsal, 2008), and contaminated food chains (Weir & Shapiro, 1981), “take up residence within the body ... [and become] the active substance of self” (Alaimo, 2010a, p. 102). By (re)tracing the flow of such toxic tributaries across trans-national networks of industrialised consumer capitalism, through “the environment”, and into our blood, bones, and flesh, it becomes possible to (re)imagine human corporeality as a *trans*-corporeality which exposes at vastly global and, in the same moment, intimately histological scales, that “the outlines of an impermeable, even disembodied, human figure” (Alaimo, 2010a, p. 18) are no longer theoretically, politically, and ecologically sustainable.

By bringing into sharper focus “the agencies of the material world” (Alaimo, 2016a, p. 32), I propose that trans-corporeality provides this study with the more capacious analytic required in theorising what I refer to as a *more-than↔human*⁸⁰ body whose materialities are, in Alaimo’s (2008) words, “always intermeshed with the more-than-human world” (p. 238). In doing so, I contend that trans-corporeality aids in rethinking human embodiment beyond the patriarchal, Cartesian, and Western tropes which typically insulate the conceptual bounds of male/masculine/men’s bodies from the material agencies of their bodies and their more-than-human world(s).

In the subsections which follow, I develop trans-corporeality in an effort to explore how the muscle of competitive male bodybuilders becomes materially built and gendered

⁸⁰ Here I am inspired by Alecia Jackson and Lisa Mazzei’s (2012) use of the double arrow in “material↔discursive” (p. 110) as a “gesture towards a removal of the hyphen or slash used to indicate the relationship between the material and the discursive without privileging one over the other” (p. 110). In the same vein, I employ the double arrow with the aim of emphasising how a trans-corporeal paradigm disrupts thinking/seeing/feeling the human body as a discrete unit ontologically bracketed from the more-than-human world. In this sense, my theorisation of a trans-corporeal *more-than↔human* body not only stresses the “material interconnections of human corporeality with the more-than-human world” (Alaimo, 2010a, p. 2), but, at the same time, emphasises how both the human and more-than-human become mutually “transformed by the recognition of their interconnection” (Alaimo, 2008, p. 253).

through/with/across the materialities of their more-than-human world(s). I begin by examining the theoretical status of materiality through the conceptual confines of the self-contained, disembodied, and detached Hu/Man(ist) subject of Western culture. Following this, I introduce and briefly overview the feminist-inflected critical posthumanist work to which trans-corporeality is theoretically born and politically allied. Finally, I discuss Alaimo's trans-corporeal rendering of subjectivity. In exploring how Alaimo (2010a) theoretically constructs a materially embodied human who is "substantially coextensive with the rest of the world" (p. 125), I concentrate on two concepts which have influenced the application of her trans-corporeal subject in this study, namely: (1) intra-activity; and (2) affect.

In pursuing a feminist posthumanist theoretical trajectory, it is important to recognise how Alaimo's (2016a) work on trans-corporeality ultimately endeavours to "loosen the grip of "the human" on the human" (p. 32, quotations original). Thus, before proceeding further, it is necessary to consider what the term "human" has come to designate in Western thought.

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of English*, a human is defined as: "A man, woman, or child of the species *Homo sapiens*, distinguished from other animals by superior mental development, power of articulate speech, and upright stance" (Stevenson, 2010, p. 853). At face value, the term human may therefore appear to suggest a unitary, immutable, and unquestionable conceptual category designating a supposedly self-evident product of evolution – the species *Homo sapiens*. On the contrary, the word human is a "politically loaded concept" (Teittinen, 2016, p. 155) whose ideological scaffolding has changed, and continues to change, "not only from one historical era to another but also with context"⁸¹

⁸¹ This is evident in the very etymology of the word "human". According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary* (2001), "human" dates back to the mid-fifteenth century *humain*, *humaine*, "human", from Old French *humain*, *umain* (adjective) "of or belonging to man" (twelfth century), from Latin *humanus* "of man, human". This is in part from PIE **(dh)ghomon-*, literally "earthling, earthly being", as opposed to the gods. Comparative to the Hebrew *adam* "man", from *adamah* "ground". Cognate with the Old Lithuanian *žmuo* "man, male person".

(Sax, 2011, p. 21). What this underlines is that “who” and “what” have been recognised as human has never simply been a biological given, but, rather, a terminological terrain contested and determined by scientific, religious, social, political, economic, and legal authorities (Herbrechter, 2013).

In this sense, the cultural construction of the human and, by extension, “humanity” and “humankind”, has throughout the historical development of Western civilisation, always entailed the “ongoing work of patrolling, revising, contesting, and enforcing ... boundaries” (Pensky, 2008, p. xii) which conceptually constitute the essential and universal features of the human by Othering⁸² that which is considered to be non-human. In this regard, the conceptual category of the human has not only come to designate a specific anthropomorphic form and corresponding level of physiological and physical functionality classifiable as human(ness) (Shildrick, 2002), but, also, a peculiar set of intellectual capabilities considered the unique preserve of human beings, such as, rationality, logic, sentience, and self-consciousness (Yarri, 2005). In doing so, the human becomes a subject who is assigned moral and cultural qualities premised on the so-called “human condition”, such as, agency, free will, meaning, progress, and self-determination (Janicaud, 2005; Wilson, 2014).

To this effect, the conceptual framework of and for the human in Western thought not only “operates ... descriptively but also prescriptively and proscriptively” (Giffney & Hird, 2008, p. 7); with admission into the category of the human also determining access to social, political, and economic privileges, as well as legal protections (Ishay, 2008). What this underscores is how the human has come to serve, in both discursive and material ways, as an

⁸² The logic underpinning this Othering has probably been most incisively detailed by Plumwood (1993) as involving five interrelated orientations of thought towards the non-human, including: (1) *backgrounding* (denying the significance of the Other to the privileged term); (2) *radical exclusion* (seeing an atomistic hyperseparation between the Other and the privileged term); (3) *incorporation* (defining the Other in terms of and in relation to the privileged term); (4) *instrumentalisation* (objectifying the Other as a resource that exists solely for the use and benefit of the privileged term); and (5) *homogenisation* (stereotyping both the Other and the privileged term through a set of essential and exclusive characteristics). Together, these logics establish and sustain a totalising, absolute, and hierarchical human/non-human binary.

“exclusionary category not only between [human and non-human] species but also within biological humanity” (Teittinen, 2016, p. 156). This, as Roffe and Stark (2015) allude, has been most evident in the ways that Western culture and science has often denied Other(ed) people access to the status and rights of the human through “violent political exclusions based on race, gender, sexuality, and bodily capacities and incapacities” (p. 2).

For Bourke (2011), the cultural reiteration and regulation of the human is an effect of Western society’s “compulsive inclination to demarcate the territory of the human from the non-human” (p. 5); at the heart of which lies an “ ‘anthropocentric bias’ that accords more value to human life than to the ‘material’ in, around, and through which that life is lived” (Coward, 2006, p. 420, quotations original). As a defining hallmark of Western thought (Woodward, 2008), anthropocentrism is a worldview which places “humans at the centre of our understanding of the world” (Alaimo, 2017c, p. 415) by, first and foremost, “separat[ing] them from that world” (Nimmo, 2011, p. 60). In this regard, anthropocentrism predicates itself on a “three-fold thesis, according to which humans are special and privileged entities compared to other living beings (ontology), they are the only sources of knowledge (epistemology) and the sole holders of moral values (ethics)” (Ferrante & Sartori, 2016, p. 176).

Considered within historical trajectory of Western civilisation, which is itself a his/tory formed through the intertwining influences of patriarchy (Lerner, 1986), Cartesianism (Bordo, 1987), and humanism (Davies, 1997); the ontological, epistemological and ethical bases of anthropocentrism have functioned like an “anthropological machine” (Agamben, 2004, p. 29), not only (re)producing the human/non-human binary as the central organising structure of Western thought and society (Sheets-Johnstone, 1996), but, at the same time, (re)defining a particular kind of (Hu/)Man (being) whose cultural status is dominant and exceptional amongst humans, and whose ontological relations with the

non/less-human world are “disembodied, disembedded, and discontinuous” (Plumwood, 2012, p. 79).

In attempting to grasp how the materiality of human bodies and the more-than-human world has been historically shaped under the sign of the patriarchal and Cartesian Hu/Man(ist) subject, I will now go on to trace the conceptual genealogy of this subject in Western thought.

3.1.1. The materiality of Man: Tracing the ontological outline of the Hu/Man(ist) subject.

The ontological origins of the Hu/Man(ist) subject, at least as “it” or, more accurately, “He”, has appeared as the dominant representation and image of and for those identified as human, specifically, and those considered part of humanity or (hu/)mankind, more broadly, within the cultural imaginary of patriarchal Western civilisation and, in particular, the his/tory of malestream Western academia, has roots which extend back to the naissance of ancient Greek philosophy, up to five-hundred years BCE (Braidotti, 2006, 2013, 2016a, 2016b). It was here that a distinctly individuated human first appeared through the confluence of religio-cultural and philosophical frames of reference underwriting those political and economic systems designating citizenship and organising social as well as labour relations with the formation of the first city-states in ancient Greece (Newmyer, 2017; Sassi, 2001; Walsh, 1981).

In the milieu of Grecian antiquity, it was the Greek male who was first inaugurated as “Man”, that is, *the* “standard-bearer of the ‘human’ ” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 28, quotations original) and, to this end: gravitational centre of public life; benchmark of civilised culture; subject of his/tory; progenitor of Western scholarly thought; and, in sum, “measure of all

things”⁸³. Culturally constructed “through a catalogue of difference” (duBois, 1991, p. 4); the Greek male was philosophically and politically constituted as human, generally, and Man, more specifically, through the sum of that which was considered “not-animal, not-barbarian, [and] not-female” (duBois, 1991, p. 4). The ancient Greeks designed the original ontological formula defining the categories of “the human” and “the non-human” through an exclusionary logic predicated on a “dualised structure of otherness and negation” (Plumwood, 1993, p. 42).

To this effect, the corporeal contents and contours of Man were constituted through a set of mutually reinforcing oppositional binaries, including: male/female; citizen/slave; Greek/barbarian; reason/passion; and Culture/Nature (Gilhus, 2006; MacCormack, 1980). While the former components of these dualisms collectively combined to conceptually cast Man in the superior terms of “spirit, mind, and reason” (Plumwood, 2005, p. 235); the latter were united by and bound to a more devalued “earthly, material world” (Plumwood, 2005, p. 235) through an expanding series of associations: the *more* earthly, *more* material, *more* corporeal, and *more* embodied were *less* rational, *less* perfect, and, ultimately, *less* Hu/Man (Steiner, 2005).

Later, under the influence of Plato (±428-±348BCE) and Aristotle’s (±384-±322BCE) hierarchically-oriented philosophies of the cosmos, Man, now embodied as the able-bodied, civilized, and cerebral Roman male, was increasingly formulated as not just ontologically separate from, but, superior to, lesser/non-humans (O’Meara, 1987; Spelman, 1982). The shift toward more hierarchised visions of the world would be intensified under the growth of Christianity and the development of feudal and monarchic states in medieval Europe, from the first century CE (Jones, 2013). Together, these developments heralded the cultural canonisation of the “Great Chain of Being” (Lovejoy, 1936): a part-theological-part-quasi-

⁸³ Attributed to Greek philosopher Protagoras’s (±490-±420BCE) claim: “Man is the measure of all things, of the things that are how they are, and of the things that are not how they are not” (Epps, 1964, p. 223).

scholastic metaphysic categorising all life into “ethereal” (heavenly), “mortal” (human), and “lower” (animal, vegetal, and mineral) orders (Kuntz & Kuntz, 1987).

The “Great Chain” not only devised and regulated relations of superiority and subordination between and within different life-forms (Hawkins, 1995), but, also, consecrated White Western Man at “the pinnacle of Creation” (Daston & Mitman, 2005, p. 4): sitting atop all Other(ed) earthly life⁸⁴ (White, 1967), by virtue of Man’s unique endowment with reason and an immortal soul (Bordo, 1993; Dyer, 1997). To this end, Man was clerically conceived as not only able to achieve spiritual transcendence to higher celestial planes of being beyond the “mortal, lustful, [and] sinful carnality” (Grosz, 1994, p. 5) of their material bodies, but, moreover, granted dominion over lesser humans not believed to be capable of reason, such as, women and ethnic(ised) people, as well as non-human animals and plants (McClintock, 1995).

From the mid-fourteenth century, and with the onset of the Renaissance in Europe, the Judeo-Christian tradition of allocating a superlative status to Man was intellectually institutionalised in Western Europe through the establishment of the *studia humanitatis*⁸⁵ (Peters, 2015), that is, “those studies which tend to integrate and perfect the human mind and which are therefore the only ones worthy of man” (Rossi, 1933, as cited in Campana, 1946, pp. 60-61). Underpinned by the romantic humanism of the era, the exceptionalism of (the European) Man was culturally reified through a celebration of “His” purportedly unique intellectual abilities in, for example, the mastery of language (Davies, 1997). By the seventeenth century, more rational forms of humanism became dominant under the empirical climate of the Enlightenment (Kenny, 1997) and, in particular, the influence of Rene

⁸⁴ It is important to note that there were still significant strata within the order of “Man”. Kings, for example, were believed to be divinely anointed by God and, therefore, ranked “closer” to God and higher on the “Great Chain” compared to noblemen, who themselves ranked higher than those occupying the lowest rungs of human existence, such as, men from the peasantry, non-European men, disabled and infirm men, as well as women.

⁸⁵ These “humanistic studies” (Turner, 2014, p. ix) became the scholarly forbearers of today’s humanities.

Descartes (1596-1650): “the principal founding father of modern philosophy” (Scruton, 1995, p. 27).

For Descartes (1968), Man was a union of a *res cogitans* or “thinking thing”, that is, an incorporeal mind (and soul), and *res extensa* or “extended thing”, that is, a corporeal body. In elaborating their relationship to one another Descartes (1968) argued:

[A]lthough ... I have a body to which I am very closely united ... it is certain that I, that is to say, my mind, by which I am what I am, is entirely and truly distinct from my body, and may exist without it. (p. 156).

In Descartes’s analysis, the human mind and soul were an immaterial and active “substance” capable of autonomously reflecting on their own existence⁸⁶ in ways the passive “substance” constituting the material body, Other(ed) material beings (such as, animals), and the material world, could not (Nadler, 2013; Rozemond, 2008). In localising “the essence of the human ... in the rational mind” (Badmington, 2004, p. 6), Cartesianism not only gendered the ideal human subject as male/masculine/Man, but, simultaneously, founded the Enlightenment model of Man on a “mind-body dualism – that master binary of self-other” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 494).

Emerging out of the Enlightenment, Descartes’s model of Man became increasingly dominant in the ways “male history and scientific patriarchy” (Brodribb, 1993, p. 15) scripted European men at the centre of the Western world. In fact, this Euro-centric worldview of Man was further entrenched with the project of European colonialism which, through violent territorial imperialism, “inflicted particular ways of thinking, and particular ways of being human, upon the colonised” (Knox, 2014, p. 92). At the same time, as the desire for constitutional governance gradually took hold of Europe, the philosophical and political construction of Man would become consonant with more liberal values of humanism

⁸⁶ A sentiment captured in Descartes’s classic dictum “cogito ergo sum” (or “I think, therefore I am”), from his 1637 text, *Discourse on Method*.

espousing autonomy, freedom, and dignity⁸⁷. And, with the onset of the Industrial Revolution from the latter 1700s, Man would also become seen as dissociated from those lesser-humans and the non-human world “He” would need to dominate and exploit, for capitalist gain (Lukes, 2006).

Since the 1800s, the (post-)Enlightenment model of Man in Western thought has been one premised on both an existential and empirical embrace of: (1) *disembodiment*, from the materiality of the corporeal body (Shildrick & Price, 1999); and (2) *detachment*, from the materiality of the more-than-human world (Hviding, 2003). It is, therefore, unsurprising that patriarchal, Cartesian, and Euro-centric tropes have often come to suffuse the most idealised/idolised forms of Hu/Man subjectivity with a definitively immaterial set of core features, namely: “rationality, authority, autonomy and agency” (Nayar, 2014, p. 5).

Whilst it is, in this regard, that matter/the material/materiality –divested of life, vitality, agency– has typically come to constitute the pejorative boundary delimiting those Other(ed) more marginal (female/animal/Queer/disabled/Black) lives (and bodies) which matter less because of their association to the status of the non/lesser-human; it is also this humanocentric habit of thought which has prompted the rise of a broad trans-disciplinary base of posthumanist scholars seeking to imagine “a new figuration of the human after the Human” (Alaimo, 2018b, p. 436), that is, a conceptualisation of human subjectivity and embodiment not founded on the exclusionary force of interlocking anthropo/andro/Euro-centrisms which have long organised Western thinking.

⁸⁷ The most evident example being the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*, in 1789.

3.1.2. Imagining a more-than↔human beyond the Hu/Man: Critical posthumanism, feminist posthumanism, and the posthuman body.

While the “post” of posthumanism may appear to signify a “point of departure from the ideology preceding it” (Ruzek, 2014, p. 22), namely, humanism; it should not be misread to signal the arrival of a single unified theory, philosophy, or politics that chronologically supplants and therefore marks the end of humanocentric thought⁸⁸ (Pedersen, 2010). On the contrary, having been characterised as both “contested” (Knox, 2014, p. 29) and “vague” (Best & Kellner, 2001, p. 195); it would “be misleading to suggest that posthumanism is a neatly bounded category” (Jeffery, 2016, p. 11) of scholarly work. According to Ferrando (2013a) posthumanism is better thought of as an “umbrella term” (p. 49) that identifies a diverse base of scholarship emerging both within and across different academic disciplines and allied by a desire to “challenge long-standing ideas about the definition of “the human” and its place in the world” (Snaza & Weaver, 2015, p. 5, quotations original).

Although the term “post-humanism” first appeared in the work of literary theorist Ihab Hassan (1977, 1987); it was only in the 1990s when a series of publications conceptually developing the “posthuman” as a theoretical, empirical, and political (re)figuration of the Hu/Man (Haraway, 1992; Spanos, 1993; Halberstam & Livingston, 1995; Foster, 1996; McCracken, 1997; Farnell, 1998; Hayles, 1999), that posthumanism began to enjoy sustained academic interest. However, since its inception, the posthuman has proven to be “a slippery figure” (Christmas, 2013, p. 9); in large part through its conceptual deployment in disparate lines of empirical enquiry informed by multiple and sometimes conflicting lineages, and with markedly different political ends (Miah, 2007). In this regard, a number of writers have attempted to thematise the disparate strands of posthumanist theorising (Herbrechter, 2013;

⁸⁸ In other words, the “post” prefix does not demarcate posthumanism as a “new” philosophy that can be chronologically located “after”, and in some way supplanting, the insights or values of humanism.

Nayar, 2014; Roden, 2015); of which the two most prominent, and often inadequately differentiated, are: (1) transhumanism⁸⁹; and (2) critical posthumanism⁹⁰.

According to Ferrando (2014a), transhumanism considers “science and technology as the main assets of reformulation of the notion of the human, and employs the notion of the “posthuman” to name an era in which such reformulations will have irredeemably impacted the evolution of the human, giving rise to the posthuman” (p. 170, quotations original). Thus, at the heart of transhumanist philosophy is the belief that “current human nature is improvable through the use of applied science” (Bostrom, 2005, p. 202). Transhumanists therefore embrace techno-cultural developments, such as, genetic engineering, bio/nano-technology, artificial intelligence, cybernetics, regenerative and prosthetic medicine, cryogenics, pharmaceutical enhancement, and mind-uploading, as vital milestones which move humankind towards what bioethicist Linda Glenn characterises as “humanity-plus”⁹¹ (as cited in Max, 2017, p. 52): a cultural (r)evolution in which both the human body and human intellect can be advanced through the addition of technology to ensure that humans not only live longer, but, moreover, expand into new more demanding extra-terrestrial frontiers⁹² (Max, 2017).

Now, while transhumanist discourse conceptually destabilises the conventional form and functionality of the human through techno-modification (Moravec, 1988); this philosophy also retains a Western and Cartesian model of the humanist subject at its centre by reiterating Enlightenment tropes of human perfectibility and transcendence (Onishi, 2011). This kind of transhumanist thinking can be seen in Kurzweil’s (2005) assertion that human consciousness will ultimately exceed the “severe limitations” (p. 325) imposed by the

⁸⁹ Also characterised as popular or speculative posthumanism (Jeffery, 2016).

⁹⁰ Also characterised as cultural or philosophical posthumanism (Ferrando, 2013b).

⁹¹ Or what Roden (2015) refers to as “Humanity 2.0” (p. 25) and what Mitchell (2003) calls “Me+++”. The “plus” signs mark a techno-amplified human whose customised “enhancement” with technology is largely utilitarian.

⁹² In 1998 the World Transhumanist Association published a *Transhumanist Declaration* which detailed a host of goals which transhumanist philosophy and practice aims to achieve, including: “overcoming aging, cognitive shortcomings, involuntary suffering, and our confinement to planet Earth” (as cited in Roden, 2015, p. 14).

material limitations of the human body through its transmission into other forms of computational hardware and virtual reality. Whilst, for Kurzweil (2005), the future of biological flesh-formed bodies are that of “morphable projections of ... [human] intelligence” (p. 324); it is the grand futuristic narrative of a techno-transcendence and, in particular, the disembodiment of human rationality that, as Wolfe (2010) notes, often marks transhumanism as “an *intensification* of humanism”⁹³ (p. xv, emphasis original), or what Onishi (2011) calls an “ultra-humanist logic” (p. 104).

Contrary to transhumanism, critical posthumanism(s) frame the “posthuman as a condition which is already accessible, since we have never been human: “human” is a human concept, based on humanistic and anthropocentric premises” (Ferrando, 2014a, p. 170, quotations original). According to Braidotti (2016a), critical posthumanism developed from “the convergence of anti-humanism on the one hand and anti-anthropocentrism on the other” (p. 16). With intellectual roots grounded in the postmodern and poststructural anti-humanisms of the 1970s (Braidotti, 2013); critical posthumanist thought takes its cue from Foucault’s (1966/2005) contention that “man is an invention of recent date. And perhaps one nearing its end” (p. 422). To this effect, critical posthumanism begins with the anti-humanist critique and activism of feminist, Black, gay, and disabled people which deconstruct the male, White, straight, and able-bodied Western (Hu/)Man as the dominant and normative standard for all Other(ed) humans (Braidotti, 2013). However, critical posthumanism also goes further by drawing from the anti-anthropocentric and environmental movement that “criticizes species hierarchy and advances ecological justice” (Braidotti, 2016a, pp. 13-14).

Contemporary critical posthumanist work spans a broad range of disciplines, including: science studies (Pickering, 2008); feminist theory (Braidotti, 2016a); critical race studies (Jackson, 2013); environmental theories (Ferrando, 2016); postcolonial theory

⁹³ For this reason Wolfe (2010) regards transhumanism as a “ “bad” posthumanism” (p. xvii, quotations original).

(Banerji & Paranjape, 2016); music (Burton, 2017); disability studies (Goodley, Lawthom, & Cole, 2014); Queer theory (MacCormack, 2009); history (Domanska, 2010); literature (Herbrechter & Callus, 2012); film (Hauskeller, Carbonell, & Philbeck, 2015); food studies (Alexander, Gregson, & Gille, 2013); geography (Braun, 2004); consumer studies (Giesler & Venkatesh, 2005); linguistics (Pennycook, 2018); politics (Cudworth & Hobden, 2018); education (Weaver, 2010); animal studies (Ryan, D., 2015); biology (Campbell & Saren, 2010); plant studies (Ryan, J., 2015); economics (Schönpflug & Klapeer, 2017); organisational theory (Bryant & Cox, 2013); anthropology (Smart & Smart, 2017); architecture (Meaney, 2013); law (Wolfe, 2013); international relations theory (Cudworth & Hobden, 2011); health studies (Rock, Degeling, & Blue, 2013); information technology (Mahon, 2017), and psychology (McPhie, 2019), to name a few.

As critical posthumanism(s) have attracted greater interest they have helped to cultivate new schools of theory in, for example: actor network theory (Latour, 2005; Law & Hassard, 1999); new materialism (Coole & Frost, 2010; van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2010); thing theory (Brown, 2003); object oriented ontologies (Bogost, 2012; Bryant, 2011; Harman, 2011); speculative realism (Harman, 2010); neovitalism (Fraser, Kember, & Lury, 2006); affect theory (Latimer & Miele, 2013); non-representational theory (Thrift, 2008); and post-qualitative methodology (Lather, 2016a). In doing so, critical forms of posthumanism have come to occupy the frontlines of an increasingly inter/trans/post-disciplinary “posthumanities” – an arena of scholarly work being critically advanced by the contribution of posthuman(ist) feminisms (Åsberg, Koobak, & Johnson, 2011a, 2011b).

It is not just that “feminism and posthumanism share a mutually beneficial relationship” (Marchand & Stratman, 2017, p. 413) underscored by a desire to overturn the patriarchal and masculinist norms which continually reconfigure the disembodiment and enclosure of the Hu/Man(ist) subject in Western thought; but, more significantly, that

“feminism is embedded in the genealogy of the posthuman” (Ferrando, 2014a, p. 169) and, in particular, the posthuman body (Ferrando, 2014b). Although beginning with Donna Haraway’s (1985) feminist figuration of the techno-organic cyborg; today, critical posthumanism(s) draw theoretical insights and methodological practices from important “turns” in feminist work on the body, including, the corporeal (Witz, 2000), affective (Clough, 2008), material (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008), ontological (Feely, 2016), and non-human (Grusin, 2015).

In this regard, posthumanist theory increasingly drives new courses of (pro)feminist thought on the body characterised by a dizzying array of “post” directions, including, the post-poststructural (Åsberg, 2008), post-millennial (McNeil, 2010), post-constructionist (Lykke, 2010a), and post-anthropocentric (Ohrem, 2015). Much of this work has endeavoured towards what Lykke (2010a) describes as a “nodal point or momentary frame of joint reference” (p. 132) through which to (re)theorise “bodily and transcorporeal materialities in ways that neither push feminist thought back into the traps of biological determinism or cultural essentialism, nor make feminist theorizing leave bodily matter and biologies “behind” in a critically under-theorized limbo” (pp. 131-132, quotations original).

Running throughout much of this work are critical posthumanist trajectories of thought which are at the heart of a wave of “new material feminisms”⁹⁴ that are “rethinking matter: the stuff of which humans, non-humans, and nature is comprised” (Wingrove, 2016, p. 455). While the topic of matter⁹⁵ may have traditionally been the subject matter of physics; new material feminisms are redefining matter (and physics for that matter) as a political and ethical subject for feminist theory (Lykke, 2010b). By critically (re)evaluating “assumptions

⁹⁴ Also referred to as “material feminism” (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008), “new feminist materialism” (van der Tuin, 2011), or “feminist new materialism” (Wingrove, 2016). New material feminisms, which “focus on the significance and agency of matter as substances, bodies, or environments” (Alaimo, 2017c, p. 421); should not be confused with *materialist* feminisms which have developed from feminist uptakes of Marxist historical and dialectical materialism, and whose focus is the gendered reproduction of structural/economic inequalities.

⁹⁵ Defined, in physics, as “that which occupies space and possess rest[ing] mass” (Stevenson, 2010, p. 1093).

about how ‘matter’ is lived and constituted relationally through entanglements of human and non-human bodies, affects, objects and practices” (Fullagar, 2017, p. 250, quotations original); new material and feminist posthumanism(s) are in fact continuing the “long history of feminist political struggles enacted over and through materiality” (Alaimo, 2017b, p. xiv), but in ways not incumbered by the conceptual confines of a Hu/Man(ist) subject or body.

3.1.3. Theorising a trans-corporeal subject: Trans-corporeality, materiality, and the more-than-human world.

As a “mode of posthumanism” (Alaimo, 2018a, p. 49), trans-corporeality theoretically transforms/mogrifies “the human subject into a posthuman subject who is always already the very stuff of the world” (Alaimo, 2016b, p. 545). To this effect, Alaimo’s (2010a) conceptual formulation of her “trans-corporeal subject” (p. 146) is not so much a theory on/of human subjectivity, per say; but, rather, an expanded posthumanist ontology which shifts the focus of analytical attention away from an autonomous and unified Hu/Man(ist) subject, and towards those trans-corporeal relations which materially inter-connect human bodies through/with/across their more-than-human world(s).

In developing her trans-corporeal rendering of subjectivity Alaimo (2016a) acknowledges that she is indebted to feminist-inflected theories of the body and, in particular, “Judith Butler’s conception of the subject as immersed within a matrix of discursive systems” (p. 112). However, mindful of how discourse-oriented poststructural, postmodern, and social constructionist feminist work has tended to “retreat from materiality”⁹⁶ (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008, p. 3) and, in particular, the materiality of human bodies and the more-than-human world; Alaimo positions trans-corporeality as a part of those emerging and overlapping new material and posthumanist forms of feminism at the forefront of developing a “new way of

⁹⁶ A contention which has not gone without heated debate (Ahmed, 2008).

understanding the relationship between discourse and matter that does not privilege the former to the exclusion of the latter” (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008, p. 6).

In doing so, Alaimo (2016a, 2016b) theoretically transfuses her trans-corporeal subject with Karen Barad’s (2007) intra-activity: a concept which has proven immensely influential in advancing new material and posthumanist modes of feminism in theorising material↔discursive entanglement (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) while, at the same time, tackling “the central ... question of agency, particularly the agency of bodies and natures” (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008, p. 7). For Alaimo (2008), it is Barad’s “compelling model of materiality, specifically, of material agency” (p. 248) that influences her work on trans-corporeality and, through this, her desire “to understand agency without a subject, actions without actors ... [and] matter as activity rather than passive substance” (p. 245).

In considering what Alaimo’s trans-corporeality therefore portends for how I conceptually develop competitive male bodybuilders and their muscle, I will, at first, outline the influence of Karen Barad’s intra-activity on trans-corporeality and, in turn, its implications for how I theorise materiality, gender, and bodies in this study. Thereafter, I explore how the concept of affect also deepens the application of trans-corporeality in this study.

3.1.3.1. Trans-corporeality, intra-activity, gender, and bodies: The material↔discursive, a posthumanist performativity, and spacetime mattering.

In the preface to her influential tome, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, feminist-physicist Karen Barad (2007) asserts:

Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating. Which is not to say that emergence happens once and for all, as an event or as a process that takes place according to some external measures of space and of time, but rather that time and space, like matter and meaning, come into existence, are iteratively

reconfigured through each intra-action, thereby making it impossible to differentiate between creation and renewal, beginning and returning, continuity and discontinuity, here and there, past and future. (p. ix).

It is in these opening lines that Barad (2007) foregrounds the core thesis underwriting her radically relational ontology of the world, namely: that “the primary ontological units [of reality and any study thereof] are not ‘things’ but phenomena – dynamic topological reconfigurings/entanglements/relationalities/(re)articulations of the world” (p. 141, quotations original). It is through this central contention that Barad (1996, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2014a, 2014b, 2015, 2017a, 2017b) formulates her theory of “agential realism” – a posthumanist metaphysic which contests the ways that modern philosophy and science has tended to “thingify” the world into discrete “relata”⁹⁷. According to Barad (2007), “thingification” is a habit of thought, subtended by Western atomism, which sustains a “belief that the world is populated with individual things with their own independent sets of determinate properties” (p. 19). In reconfiguring this model, Barad (2007) introduces the neologism “intra-action” in an effort to conceptually articulate:

the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual “interaction,” which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action. It is important to note that the “distinct” agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute, sense, that is, *agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don’t exist as individual elements.* (p. 33, emphasis and quotations original).

In doing so, Barad’s (2007) understanding of intra-activity proffers a posthumanist paradigm in which agency is no longer “aligned with human intentionality or subjectivity” (p. 177). For Barad (2007), agency is produced through intra-activity; it is not an “attribute” or “property” of either side of longstanding Western dualisms, including, human/non-human,

⁹⁷ Barad (2003) describes “relata” as the “antecedent components of relations” (p. 812). For Barad (2007), “relations are not secondarily derived from independently existing relata; rather, the mutual ontological dependence of relata –the relation– is the ontological primitive” (p. 429).

subject/object, matter/discourse, mind/body, animate/inanimate, cultural/natural – for “they do not pre-exist as such” (p. 214). In this sense, Barad (2007) theoretically reframes agency as “a matter of intra-acting; ... an enactment, ... [a] “doing” or “being” in its intra-activity” (Barad, 2007, p. 178, quotations original). For Barad (2007), intra-activity therefore becomes the generative force of materialisation, that is, the ongoing process through which (human and non-human) agencies intra-actively co-constitute each other in an emergent mutual becoming.

This relational ontology provides Barad (2007) a theoretical platform through which matter itself becomes reconceptualised in terms of intra-activity, that is, as a “dynamic and shifting entanglement of relations, rather than a property of things” (p. 224). In explaining how she understands the processes through which matter/the material/materiality of human (and non-human) bodies materialise, Barad draws from Butler’s (1993) theory of (gender) performativity⁹⁸. However, where Butler’s (1993) theory of performativity stresses “the productive and, indeed, materializing effects of regulatory practices” (pp. 9-10) in producing human bodies as dichotomously “sexed”; Barad (2007) argues that “Butler’s theory ultimately reinscribes matter as a passive product of discursive practices rather than as an active agent participating in the very process of materialization” (p. 151). To this end, Barad theoretically extends performativity through her concept of intra-activity in two ways: (1) as simultaneously material↔discursive; and (2) through the lens of posthumanism.

Firstly, Barad (2007) argues that “discourses and material phenomena do not stand in a relationship of externality to one another; rather the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity” (p. 149). Contra Butler, Barad (2007) argues that “materialization is not the end product or simply a succession of intermediary effects of

⁹⁸ Barad (2007) adopts a performative approach which displaces the binary thinking of representationalism and the correlated belief “that there are representations, on the one hand, and ontologically separate entities awaiting representations, on the other” (p. 49). For Barad (2007) performativity “shifts the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality (e.g., do they mirror nature or culture?) to matters of practices, doings, and actions” (p. 135).

purely discursive practices. Materiality itself is a factor in materialization” (p. 180). It is, in this regard, that Barad (2007) theorises the performative production of bodies as “material-discursive phenomena” (p. 153). In doing so, however, Barad (2007) is not merely suggesting that “there are important material factors in addition to discursive ones”⁹⁹ (p. 152), but, rather:

The relationship between the material and the discursive is one of mutual entailment. Neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior. Neither can be explained in terms of the other. Neither is reducible to the other. Neither has privileged status in determining the other. Neither is articulated or articulable in the absence of the other; matter and meaning are mutually articulated. (p. 152).

Interestingly, Barad’s theorisation of material↔discursive intra-action has been extended by a host of studies analysing the material↔discursive performativity of gender¹⁰⁰ (Allegranti, 2013; Damsholt, 2012; Ivanson & Renold, 2016; Parkins, 2008). In one study, Ringrose and Rawlings (2015) use material↔discursive intra-activity to explore the gender-based bullying and “slut-shaming” of school-going girls. For Ringrose and Rawlings (2015), it is not enough for schools to simply reengineer their language policies by, for example, banning derogatory words like “slut”. Ringrose and Rawlings (2015) conclude that this kind of strategy focuses solely on the constitutive force of “slut discourses” whilst neglecting “to recognise the material forces that intra-act with the [slut-shaming] discourse. In this case [how] the posthuman materialities of the [length of a] skirt, [style of] hair and [presence or

⁹⁹ Nor is Barad suggesting that we “turn the tables” on poststructural, postmodern, or constructionist paradigms by rejecting discourse/the discursive/discursivity in favour of matter/the material/materiality – for this would leave the logic of Western hierarchicised dualisms intact. For Barad (2014a), the point of moving towards more relational ontologies which stress the mutual entailment and entanglement of, for example, matter and discourse, is not just to underscore “the intertwining of two (or more) states/entities/events” (p. 178), but, rather, to call “into question ... the very nature of twoness, and ultimately of one-ness as well” (p. 178).

¹⁰⁰ As well as other social statuses and modes of embodiment, such as, race (Kummen, 2014), disability (Näslund (2017), sexuality (Renold & Ringrose, 2017), and aging (Siverskog, 2015).

absence of] make-up work together to produce the dynamical force of ... slut-shaming” (p. 100).

In this instance, Ringrose and Rawlings’s (2015) study highlights how bodily materialities become active participants in the process of materialisation through which gender as well as gender(ed) power dynamics come into being and come to be materially embodied and felt. From this perspective, (human and non-human) bodies (intra-)actively co-participate in their gendering – a finding which has also been reiterated in Baradian-inspired examinations of how the material agencies of muscle (Tuana, 1996), blood (Fraser & Valentine, 2006), and fat (Colls, 2007), actively participate in how bodies become gendered in material↔discursive ways.

Interestingly, Ringrose and Rawlings’s (2015) work also channels Barad’s (2007) second critique of Butler’s performativity, namely, that it is largely “limited to an account of the materialization of human bodies or, more accurately, to the construction of the contours of the human body” (p. 151). To this effect, Barad (2007) offers what she describes as a posthumanist elaboration of performativity which takes “into account the fact that the forces at work in the materialization of bodies ... are not all human” (pp. 33-34). This posthumanist account of performativity has been popular in a variety of post-anthropocentric work which displaces humanocentric biases that theorise agency as a unique possession of the humanist subject (Aradau, 2010; O’Grady, 2015; Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013; Young, 2016).

In one such study, Irni (2013) extends Barad’s posthumanist rendering of performativity to sex hormones and trans peoples’ access to hormone products. Irni (2013) contends that because “the effects of sex hormone products extend from being merely chemical into a broader material-discursive process where sex is enacted” (p. 48) the processes of hormonal change cannot simply be a matter of internal human endocrinology. Irni’s (2013) point is that as bio-chemical physiology intra-acts with hormone-testing

apparatuses and procedures, bodily “sex” itself materialises through the performative co-participation of a host of material↔discursive bio-technological agencies which far exceed yet also enfold the individual human body. Importantly, however, it is not only the human body which is, in this case, “sexed”. At the same time, health care systems which provide access to hormone products, the legislative frameworks governing (or outlawing) gender transitioning, and the clinico-cultural hegemony of a two-sex society, also become intra-actively (re)constituted.

In underscoring the intra-active and posthumanist performativity of matter and discourse, I consider Baradian-inspired analyses of gender and bodies to offer this study a mode of theorising which contests the idea that gender is, to paraphrase Lara et al. (2017), a discursively constructed identitarian container for a sovereign subject and body. Rather, intra-activity, like trans-corporeality, foregrounds subjectivity and embodiment as a *becoming*¹⁰¹ gendered through “networks of intra-active material agencies” (Alaimo, 2016a, p. 113); and, in so doing, theorises “gender as an iterative, fluid, and multiple phenomenon, inextricable from the material-discursive configurations of its emergence” (Lyttleton-Smith, 2017, p. 9).

Interestingly, Barad’s posthumanist performativity is not only concerned with the intra-activity of those more tangible materialities, such as, human bodies and non-human objects, but, also, with the influence of non-human forces whose roles in the materialisation of bodies is often seen as far less participatory, such as, space and time. For Barad (2007), “[b]odies do not simply take their place *in* the world” (p. 170, emphasis added), but, rather,

¹⁰¹ Drawn from the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), the concept of “becoming” has achieved significant resonance within new material and feminist posthumanist work (Braidotti, 1994; Buchanan & Colebrook, 2000; Colebrook, 2002). In theorising gender and embodiment, the Deleuzo-Guattarian sense of becoming displaces the independent and individuated subject of Western Enlightenment thought through a new ontology which (re)envisioned embodiment as “never separable from ... relations with the world” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 125). In this sense, “becoming gendered” does not refer to a static sense of sexed/gendered subjectivity or embodiment, such as, “being” male/masculine/man or “being” female/feminine/woman, but, rather, calls attention to gender as a process of *gendering* which is itself ontologically enacted and constituted through complex webs of more-than↔human relations (Coleman, 2009, 2011).

through their dynamic intra-activity with the more-than-human world materialise “as ‘part’ of the world (i.e. ‘being-of-the-world,’ not being-in-the-world’)” (p. 160, quotations original). To this effect, Barad (2007) reconfigures the agency, force, and matter of space and time in the materialisation of bodies through her concept of “spacetime-mattering”¹⁰². Through spacetime-mattering Barad (2007) “aim[s] to dislocate the container model of space, the spatialization of time, and the reification of matter by ... using an alternative framework that shakes loose the foundational character of notions such as location and opens up a space of agency ... [in] the world’s becoming”¹⁰³ (p. 225). Thus, in underlining the co-constitutive intra-relationality between space, time, and matter, Barad (2007) suggests that intra-actions should not be thought of as occurring “in space” or “in time”, as if space and time are merely the external “surroundings” which mark the “context” of/for human activity. Rather, intra-activity is *of* spacetime-mattering.

The concept of spacetime-mattering has been taken up within new material and feminist posthumanist work with the aim of exploring how spatiality and temporality become intra-actively entangled with human and non-human bodies in the production of gender (Højgaard, Juelskjær, & Søndergaard, 2012; Juelskjær, 2013; Lyttleton-Smith, 2015). A good example of this can be seen in Taylor’s (2013) study of the ways in which the objects, bodies, spatialities, and temporalities of school classrooms “do crucial but often unnoticed performative work” (p. 688) in gendering the embodied power relations of mundane classroom practices. In seeing spatiality, temporality, and materiality as co-constituted through their intra-activity, the concept of spacetime-mattering displaces the taken for granted

¹⁰² Also interchangeably written as “timespacemattering”.

¹⁰³ Barad (2007) draws from the relational philosophy-physics of Danish physicist Niels Bohr (1885-1962) to counter the absolutist model of space, time, and matter laid out by Isaac Newton (1643–1727). In Newtonian physics, space and time are dislocated from one another. Space is like a “grid” in which material objects are separated from each other by space and time. In their discrete state these entities relate to one another largely through a model of mechanical causality, that is, linear cause and effect. Here, time is spatialised into a linear and universal timeline which localises time in singular periods of “the past”, “the present”, and “the future”.

way in which time and space are disarticulated from each other and exteriorised in theorising both embodiment and subjectivity (Sandilands, 2014); that is to say, that subjectivity and bodies are not considered to unfold as an effect of an individual developing *against* the backdrop of space and time. Rather, “subjectivity is of spacetime-mattering” (Juelskjær, 2013, p. 765).

For this study, I find Barad’s work on spacetime-mattering to be compatible with Alaimo’s theorisation of trans-corporeality. For Alaimo (2016a), as much as trans-corporeality articulates an embodied state of be(com)ing trans-corporeal, that is, “immersed and enmeshed in the world” (p. 157); it also describes the “space-time” (Alaimo, 2008, p. 259) or “time-space” (Alaimo, 2008, p. 238) of those trans-corporeal relations. In the fascinating paper, *Weathering: Climate Change and the “Thick Time” of Transcorporeality*, Neimanis and Walker (2014) bring together the insights of Baradian spacetime-matter and Alaimo’s trans-corporeality in an effort to reimagine how humans envisage their embodied material relations (and political orientation) to climate change. In doing so, Neimanis and Walker (2014) argue that if humans were to conceive of themselves “as *weathering*, intra-actively made and unmade by the chill of a too-cold winter, the discomfort of a too-hot sun, ... changing temperatures, rising sea levels, [and] increasingly desiccated earths” (p. 573, emphasis original), then it would be ever more possible for humans to attune to how the spatialities and temporalities of climate change are never “out there”, happening at some other place or in some other time, but, are materially transiting through us, here-and-now. In the posthumanist spacetimes/timespaces of intra-active trans-corporeal relations, human bodies become (at) the “corporeal crossroads of body and place” (Alaimo, 2010a, p. 111) through which the material spatialities and temporalities of one’s place are not simply passive parameters of analysis, but, rather, are agential forces which should be accounted for in

exploring how bodies, and the gendering of those bodies, come to matter (Bodén, 2015a; Hohti, 2016; Taylor, 2014).

In outlining Barad's relational ontology, I have attempted to highlight some of the insights that her work provides the conceptual development of a more-than↔human trans-corporeal subject through/with/across which the "rarefied contents of "the human" – mind, reason, agency, sentience – ... [are] dispersed onto a wider, and messier, field of matter" (Alaimo, 2010b, p. 28, quotations original). In exploring how the trans-corporeal relations between South African competitive male bodybuilders and their more-than-human world(s) work in materialising and gendering their muscle; I consider intra-activity and the allied concepts of the material↔discursive, a posthumanist performativity, and spacetime-mattering, to be vital constituents of the theoretical vocabulary entailed in trans-corporeally transforming/mogrifying competitive male bodybuilders' muscle into "a site of emergent material intra-actions inseparable from the very stuff of the rest of the world" (Alaimo, 2010a, p. 156).

3.1.3.2. Trans-corporeality, affect, gender, and bodies: Affecting and being affected by the more-than-human world.

In *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times*, Alaimo (2016a) argues that a "trans-corporeal subjectivity" (p. 5) is one predicated not only on understanding the ways in which the matter/material/materiality of human (and non-human) bodies extend into the world, but, in the same moment, how the world comes to "deeply *affect* bodies" (p. 5, emphasis added). Now, while Alaimo does not always explicitly develop the concept of affect in relation to trans-corporeality; she nonetheless foregrounds trans-corporeality as "a site of both pleasure and danger—the pleasures of desire, surprise, and lively emergence, as well as the dangers of pain, toxicity, and death" (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008, p. 14). In doing so, Alaimo enacts trans-corporeality as a post-individualist framework in which the sensuous

and sensual dimensions of corporeal practice are not located “in” the human mind or body, but, rather, with/in the affective qualities of more-than↔human relations.

From around the mid-1990s, a renewed interest in the development and application of the concept of affect entered academic literature in what has since been described as an “affective turn”¹⁰⁴ (Blackman & Venn 2010; Clough, 2008; Clough & Halley, 2007; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010). In many ways central to this “turn” has been Brian Massumi’s (1995) extension of Deleuze’s (1988) Spinozian philosophy of relationality, univocity, and becoming. For Massumi (1987), affect is the “ability to affect and be affected. ... [A] prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act” (p. xvi). In this regard, Massumi’s (2002, 2015) work on affect has emerged as an influential source in thinking through and with the human body, that is, in theorising the body in ways which break from the Cartesian conceptualisation of its materiality as an inert bounded mass.

According to Blackman (2008) affect focuses attention on how the body “has vitality, an aliveness that provides the potential to connect” (p. 10) both mind and body, as well as the body and world. Affect is, at its conceptual core, about relations and the intensities of those relations (Massumi, 2002). Thus, as a theoretical tool, affect “draws attention to the ways in which ‘bodies’ very broadly defined (human, animal, biological, technological, cultural), combine, assemble, articulate and shift into new formations, worked upon, as well as working on” (Wetherell, 2013, p. 350, quotations original). Nowhere has this been more evident than in those corporeal, new material, and posthumanist feminisms which have used affect theory

¹⁰⁴ Whilst, at first, this “turn to affect” (Leys, 2011, p. 434) was primarily located in the critical social sciences and humanities; it has since received attention in a wide range of fields, including, neuroscience (Damasio, 1995), geography and area studies (Massey, 2005; Thrift, 2008), critical body studies (Clough, 2012), and human-animal studies (Nyman & Schuurman, 2016), amongst many others.

to examine the “interweaving of the material, the social, the biological and the cultural, exploring processes of their co-joint figuring and articulation”¹⁰⁵ (Wetherell, 2013, p. 350).

In feminist theory, the concept of affect has, according to Liljeström (2016): “created a space for the rethinking of ... the sensual qualities of being, the capacity to experience and understand the world in ways that are profoundly relational and productive” (p. 16). Feminist-inflected affect theory has therefore entailed challenging the corporeal solidity of “the human as a singular, cohesive and bounded unit” (Roelvink & Zolkos, 2015, p. 7); and has, much like Alaimo’s trans-corporeality and Barad’s intra-activity, proven popular in posthumanist approaches to the body which “emphasize the connections between tactile and porous bodies and the transmissions between them” (Roelvink & Zolkos, 2015, p. 7).

In undermining the conceptual stability of the human, affect also destabilises the apparent naturalness of different categories of human embodiment, such as, gender (Gorton, 2013). Thus, if affect aids in demonstrating the “body’s perpetual *becoming* (always becoming otherwise, however subtly, than what it already is), pulled beyond its seeming surface-boundedness byway of its relation to, indeed its composition through, the forces of encounter” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 3, emphasis original); then gender, like other modes of human subjectivity and subjectification, becomes “one of the main elements of the social assemblage that bodies (as ‘relationships’) connect with. The affective relations that result from these connections mediate the body’s capacities, or limits, towards action. In this way, gender is crucial to the body’s affective relations and capacities” (Coffey, 2012, p. 55, quotations original).

Attending to the affective relations through which bodies become gendered contests the idea of gender(ed/ing) power as a “possession” that is (discursively) regulated into different kinds of bodies or subject positions (Massumi, 2002). Rather, in a more dynamic

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, the work of Gorton (2007), Liljeström and Paasonen (2010), Pedwell and Whitehead (2012), and Ahmed (2015).

approach, affect theory considers power to flow and congeal in, through, and between bodies (Kwek, 2012). In this sense, affective relations can be seen to intra-actively stabilise and destabilise the material and discursive boundaries of bodies, bodily practices, and embodied experiences with particular (but never determinant) potentialities of gender(ed/ing) power (Barraclough, 2014; Fullagar, 2017; Juelskjær, 2017; Juelskjær, Staunæs, Ratner, 2013). In doing so, affect foregrounds the ways in which different sensory modalities and intensities come to affect the gender(ing) of the body, “on both sides of its skin” (Eriksson, 2017, p. 3), such as: in emotional experiences of joy (Goodley, Liddiard & Runswick-Cole, 2018) and shame (Loveday, 2016); sensory registers of pain (Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2014) and pleasure (Garde-Hansen & Gorton, 2013); environmental stimuli of light (Edensor, 2012) and sound (Renold & Mellor, 2013); and physical sensations of temperature (McCormack, 2008) and motion (Martin, 2017a). Understanding affect in this way recognises, in the words of Ringrose and Renold (2016), that affectivities are both “psychical, felt, experiential effects inside the human” (p. 225) and, at the same time, “also more-than-human with spatial, atmospheric and other effects” (p. 225) – revealing what Buser (2013) alludes to is the trans-corporeal character of affect.

In this study, I consider those muscle-building↔gendering practices which materially trans-form/mogrify/figure the bodies of competitive male bodybuilders to be “intensely affective” (Coffey, 2012, p. 208). Competitive bodybuilding is an arduous form of bod(ily) labour that entails muscular carnalities, sensualities, and visceralities that are not just confined to an individuated human body. Muscle-building↔gendering practices mark a (re)working of flesh as part of which the cellular material of muscle fibres are forcefully and repetitively damaged and developed through/with/across connectivities to and the co-participation of more-than-human muscle-building agencies, such as, steroids, nutritional supplements, and gym equipment. It is by virtue of the intense (re)building of bodily flesh in

competitive bodybuilding that I consider the use of affect to enhance the attunement of a trans-corporeal analytic to those sensations, tensions, and possibilities that intra-actively (e)merge through/with/across the materialities of muscle while, at the same time, propelling and apprehending its (re)materialisation in gendered ways, shapes, and forms.

3.2. A trans-corporeal theorising of competitive male bodybuilders, their muscle, and their muscle-building↔gendering practices: A summary.

In this chapter I outlined the theories and theoretical concepts that orientate the methodological and analytical work entailed in exploring how the trans-corporeal relations between South African competitive male bodybuilders and their more-than-human world(s) materialise and gender their muscle, for competitive participation.

Throughout this chapter I sought to introduce and develop Stacy Alaimo's trans-corporeality as the core concept guiding the theoretical direction of this study. In doing so, I first examined the evolving status of matter/the material/materiality through the patriarchal, Cartesian, and anthropocentric tropes which have long contoured and encased the corporeal contents of the Western Hu/Man(ist) subject from their more-than-human world. Following this, I outlined the critical posthumanist base of scholarship to which trans-corporeality is theoretically and politically allied. As new material and feminist mode of posthumanist theorising, trans-corporeality contests the humanocentric bias which renders bodily and more-than-human materiality as inert and passive, in favour of a view in which materiality is dynamic, agential, and relational. Lastly, I unpacked how Alaimo trans-figures/forms/mogrifies human subjectivity and embodiment through her own theorising of a trans-corporeal subject. In this regard, I foreground two concepts which feature in my use of trans-corporeality and, in particular, how I approach a trans-corporeal rendering of gender

and bodies, namely: (1) Karen Barad's intra-activity and, by extension, the material↔discursive, a posthumanist performativity, and spacetime-mattering; and (2) affect.

By (re)imagining the corporeality of competitive male bodybuilders *as* trans-corporeal; this study attempts to theoretically (re)build their muscle and their muscle-building↔gendering practices as *always already* more-than↔human. In doing so, I find trans-corporeality to help provide a more radically relational ontology of the body, that is, an analytic not conceptually founded on humanocentric “detachment, dualisms, hierarchies, or exceptionalism” (Alaimo, 2018b, p. 436), but, rather, on feminist-inflected posthumanist principles of “extension, interconnection, exchange, and unravelling” (Alaimo, 2008, p. 244) which are attuned to the ways more-than-human agencies, materialities, discourse, and affects intra-actively co-participate in building and gendering competitive male bodybuilders' muscle.

Having charted trans-corporeality as the primary theatrical tool orienting the analytic of this study, I now go on to explore, in the following chapter, the posthumanist and post-qualitative methodological manoeuvres that trans-corporeality provokes and demands in research practices.

“The conventional humanist qualitative methodology described in textbooks and handbooks and university research courses is, indeed, an invention, a fiction - we made it up. For that reason, we must understand that its taken-for-granted processes, procedures, and practices now embedded in powerful institutional forces are aligned with a Platonic, Cartesian, modernist, representational, transcendent trajectory, which [Gilles] Deleuze (1968/1994) would likely call a ‘dogmatic image of thought’ ”

- Elizabeth St. Pierre highlights that a rethinking of the Western, Cartesian, and patriarchal tropes which circumscribe the Hu/Man(ist) subject must also entail a rethinking of the methodological assumptions and practices which have institutionally worked to (re)install “Him” in qualitative research, in *Post Qualitative Research: The Next Generation* (2017, p. 148, quotations original).

CHAPTER 4: MAKING A POSTHUMANIST AND POST-QUALITATIVE RESEARCH-ASSEMBLAGE

In this chapter I unpack the methodological work entailed in exploring how the trans-corporeal relations between South African competitive male bodybuilders and their more-than-human world(s) actively co-participate in materialising and gendering their muscle. The chapter is divided into two sections which aim to detail the methodological, analytical, and ethical practices of this study, followed by a concluding third section.

In the first section, I examine the origin and applications of the visual research method of autophotography which underpins much of the methodological work of this study. In this regard, I unpack how visual research methodologies, generally, and autophotography, in particular, have been developed in the critical study of men, their bodies, and their bodily practices. Following this, I assess the influence of photography on the subcultural practices of competitive male bodybuilders and consider some of the strengths and insights generated by autophotographic studies with male bodybuilders. In so doing, I consider some of the subculturally encoded humanocentric biases that shape the ways bodybuilders typically use photography and, to this effect, the methodological promise of a posthumanist approach.

Having foregrounded the analytical potential of a posthumanist-inflected methodology, I go on to discuss the overarching shift from a humanocentric and qualitative research methodology to a more posthumanist and post-qualitative research-assemblage, in the second section. Following this, I outline the methodological and ethical groundwork involved in practically recruiting participants for this study and coordinating their autophotography. Thereafter, I introduce and develop the photo-encounter as conceptual reconfiguration of the human-centred photo-elicitation interview. Following this, I discuss how trans-corporeality was put to analytical work in this study. Lastly, I offer some personal notes on my own political and ethical journey through the methodological work of this study.

4.1. Autophotography: The origin and applications of a visual research methodology with men, their bodies, and their bodily practices.

The institutional significance of (usually English) talk and text to the paradigm and practice of qualitative research can never be understated (Chadwick, 2017). Since the poststructuralist turn to discourse and, in narrower iterations, language, generations of qualitative research educators and practitioners have foregrounded a largely “word-oriented” (Prosser, 1998, p. 87) approach to data collection and analysis within the social sciences and humanities. From the copious field notes of ethnographic and observational research, to the pages of transcribed text from research interviews: qualitative research has traditionally identified words/text/the textual and, by extension, language/speech/the verbal, as the preeminent mediums through which to generate and represent the depth and complexity of human experience (Hook, 2003; Silverman, 2011); characterised by an ambivalent (if not dim) view of the value of images/imagery/the visual in qualitative research design (Schratz & Steiner-Löffler, 1998).

More recently, however, a growing body of visual research methods which utilise an expanding range of image-based material, including, advertisements, video-recordings, films, and web-based media, have increasingly sought to capitalise on the global expansion of visual media and technology in our everyday lives, especially in the Western world (Davies, Bathurst, & Bathurst, 1990; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001; Thomas, 2009). It is, within this context, that there has been an intensifying effort on the part of some qualitative methodologists to move beyond the transgenerational rehearsal of stock-standard text-based methods (Raggl & Schratz, 2004; Samuels, 2007). To this effect, visual material and methods have come to feature as a powerful yet easily accessible way of creatively extending the analytical insights of “more established qualitative methods” (Pink, 2004, p. 395).

For the purpose of this study, I am particularly interested in the use of participant-produced photography, or, what has become more commonly known as autophotography.

According to Noland (2006), autophotography “involves giving participants a camera and asking them to select and photograph items from their environment that are important to them” (p. 3); after which interviews are then usually held with the participant-photographers about their autophotographs¹⁰⁶. While the origin of autophotography can be traced to Worth and Adair’s (1972) use of video-cameras in their ethnographic work with Native Americans; it is Ziller’s (Ziller, 1990; Ziller & Lewis, 1981; Ziller & Rorer, 1985; Ziller & Smith, 1977) extension of this work, through the use of instant cameras and photographs, which has often come to stand as a reference point for contemporary forms of autophotographic research.

Over the past 30 years, a number of strengths have been noted about the use of photography, generally, and autophotography, in particular¹⁰⁷. First amongst these is that autophotographic forms of research provide “an opportunity to gain not just more but different insights into social phenomena, which research methods relying on oral, aural or written data cannot provide” (Bolton, Poie, & Mizen, 2001, p. 503). For visual methodologists, photographic material has often come to stand out in its ability to uniquely evoke strong personal connections which help jog memories, ignite new lines of discussion, form visual reference points, and enrich the verbal explanations generated in research (Latham, 2003).

Second, autophotographic studies have proven particularly adept at bringing to light the more mundane practices of research participants’ everyday lives (Pilcher, Martin, & Williams, 2016). Autophotography often brings to the fore those practices which tend to remain unexplored or hidden because of their familiarity (or their foreignness) to either the research participant or the researcher (Mannay, 2010). One of the ways this often plays out is in the self-reflective observations that photography tends to provoke from research

¹⁰⁶ I discuss the interview-based dimensions of autophotographic research later in subsection 4.2.2.

¹⁰⁷ See more extensive reviews in Chaplin (1994), Evans and Hall (1999), Emmison and Smith (2000), Banks (2001), Pink (2001), Knowles and Sweetman (2004), Banks (2008), Margolis and Pauwels (2011), and Rose (2012).

participants about the behaviours and practices captured in their photographs (Dollinger & Clancy, 1993).

Third, autophotographic research relies on research participants to bring their own knowledge to bear in discussions about their photographs. In this regard, the participant-photographer becomes an “expert guide” who leads the researcher not only through the apparent contents of their photographs, but, moreover, through the ideas and experiences attached to what is pictured (Collier & Collier, 1986). To this effect, autophotography disrupts the conventional power imbalances that typically subtends the researcher and research participant relationship. In autophotographic research, the research participant is the source of authority on their photographs (Griebeling, Vaughn, Howell, Ramstetter, & Dole, 2013).

Fourth, in emphasising the importance of participant-led photographs, autophotography empowers a research respondent to participate more actively in the research process (Clark-Ibáñez, 2007). Autophotographic work not only gives research participants a tangibly central role in the research process, but, at the same time, provides a greater sense of ownership over the photographic data, specifically, and collaboration in the research process, more broadly (Felstead, Jewson, & Walters, 2004).

Lastly, autophotographic forms of research have proven to be relatively enjoyable to participate in – for respondents and researchers (Moreland & Cowie, 2005). Not only does autophotography entail a level of novelty and excitement (Drew, Duncan, & Sawyer, 2010), but, the use of photographs in interviews has been said to help breakdown the “awkwardness associated with the traditional question and answer format of interviews” (Leonard & McKnight, 2015, p. 632).

In light of the aforementioned, it is unsurprising that autophotography has been employed within the social sciences as a way of studying both sensitive and often hard-to-

access dimensions of human experience (Oh, 2012). In this regard, the analytical and political utility of participant-produced photographs has been shown to lie in the ability of autophotography to provide context-specific and material references of the imperceptible (or deliberately ignored) organisation and effects of power in the everyday practices that (re)make different social identities and relations, including, those of class (Steiger, 1995), gender (Stiebling, 1999), and race (Boucher, 2018). Within the feminist stable of research methods, forms of autophotography have aided in making more visible the lives of marginalised people (Wang, Burris, & Xiang, 1996); especially in tangible depictions of patriarchy through women's lived experiences of gender inequality and violence (Frohmann, 2005; Kessi, 2015).

Following this, different forms of autophotography have featured in (pro)feminist studies of how boys and men construct masculinity in their experience of: heterosexuality (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007); health and illness (Olliffe & Bottorff, 2007); the spatialisation of masculinity (O'Donoghue, 2007); fatherhood (Olliffe, Bottorff, Kelly, & Halpin, 2008); non-traditional masculinities (Langa, 2008); work (Slutskaya, Simpson, & Hughes, 2012); ethnicity (Allen, 2012); class (Barnes, 2013); sexuality (Allen, 2013a); HIV (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2014); and grief (Creighton, Brussoni, Olliffe, & Han, 2017). Through much of this work, some important insights about the use of visual methodologies with research samples of men have emerged. First, visual methods represent a relatively new approach for critical studies of men that have been overwhelmingly rooted in text-based methodologies (Hearn, 2013). For Pini and Pease (2013), photographic methodologies represent the need for critical research on men "to be more inventive" (p. 19).

Second, it has not always been easy to get men to participate in research let alone talk openly on topics which conjure gendered vulnerabilities or potentially threaten social codes of masculinity and privilege (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001). To this effect, photographic

methods have been shown to disarm men and facilitate more forthright discussions by using their own photographs as a way of increasing their sense of control (OliFFE & Bottorff, 2007), trust (Barnes, 2013), and participation (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2015), in research.

Third, autophotography engages men as situated insiders capable of giving researchers access to gendered places and practices that would not ordinarily be obtained in interviews which are temporally and geographically detached from those spaces (Allen, 2011). Autophotographic research with boys and men has taken researchers into those “less visible” places, including, bedrooms (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007), male-only bathrooms (O’Donoghue, 2007), hangout spaces (Barnes, 2013), and gym locker-rooms (Allen, 2013b); in effect, bringing spatially located and peculiar gender(ed/ing) practices into critical sight.

Lastly, visual methods have proven particularly useful in demonstrating the symbolic and physical roles men’s bodies play in their embodied experience of gender (Allen, 2011). In bringing male/masculine bodies, their emplacement, and practices to the fore, autophotography has illustrated: how men gender the experience of their bodily functioning when suffering with prostate cancer (OliFFE & Bottorff, 2007); how adolescent boys corporeally style masculine confidence in clothing (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007); how male butchers develop bodily skills in the masculinised crafting of meat (Slutskaya et al., 2012); how school boys sexually embody heteronormativity (Allen, 2013a); and how young men anthropomorphise the embodiment of traditional norms of masculinity, such as, physical and emotional strength, in non-human objects, such as, large solid boulders or tall brick walls (Creighton et al., 2017).

According to Allen (2013a), the heavy reliance on largely discursive and overly narrativised methods within critical studies on men has often resulted in an analytical approach which “disembodies [men’s bodies] ..., or at best, renders the[ir] body a container for masculine subjectivity” (p. 361). For Allen (2013a), the “materiality of the body ... is not

easily captured through traditional spoken or written text-based methods like interviews or surveys” (p. 353). To this effect, photographs offer a potential counter-intervention in critical research with men because, in Allen’s (2013a) words: “photos capture flesh” (p. 358).

For some time, photographs have been argued to bring research practices closer to “real, flesh and blood life” (Becker, 2002, p. 11). This is because photographic images not only visually apprehend a body, but, moreover, render a body in place(s) (Daya & Wilkins, 2013), in relations (Allen, 2011), and in practices (Klingorová & Gökarıksel, 2018). In other words, photographic images illustrate what (gendered) bodies “do”: “doings” which do not reduce the body to a passive object or an apparent surface, but, more significantly, implicate the body’s agency in its material depth and organicity. This has been evidenced in photo-methods used in critical sport studies where autophotographs of bodies running (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2006) or playing soccer (Enright & O’Sullivan, 2012) have demonstrated how visual methods draw attention to the body’s dynamic functionality, in the fullness of its material physicality.

Apart from bodily practices, photographic methods have also been used to attend to the material transformations that bodies undergo when, for example, they are injured (Smith, 2010), as they age (Orr & Phoenix, 2015), or are surgically operated on (Schroeder, 2015). A good example here is Nash’s (2014a, 2014b, 2015) use of autophotography with pregnant women. Nash’s (2014a) work reveals the usefulness of photography in underlining how the materiality of the body is never in stasis, even when it appears “held”, in space and time, by a photographic still. Through photographic methods, the body vividly displays its material agency/ies through the ways in which its biological form and capabilities are seen (and felt) to shift and change – often without our conscious control or consent (Nash, 2014b, 2015).

It is because autophotography has proven so useful in bringing the materiality/ies of men, men’s bodies, and men’s gendered/ing bodily practices into critical sight; that I now

consider it worth examining the use autophotography with those men, bodies, and bodily practices that constitute the world of men's competitive bodybuilding.

4.1.1. Picturing bodybuilders and bodybuilding: Photography and competitive bodybuilding.

The history of bodybuilding is a visual history largely told through a photographic iconography of men, men's bodies, and men's muscle (Dutton, 1995). From the cultural memorialisation of celebrated bodybuilders in posters which hang from the walls of bodybuilding gyms, to the lengthy photo-spreads that today's top bodybuilders receive in the glossy pages of bodybuilding magazines and the webpages of online bodybuilding media; men's bodybuilding survives on the way muscle visually captures the imagination of boys and men (Klein, 1993a).

Visuality underpins the entire project of competitive bodybuilding. Competitive bodybuilders, be they male or female, must construct from their flesh a competitively-sanctioned and subculturally-prized *look*¹⁰⁸, that is, a body of muscle which is not only *visually* pronounced in its built muscularity, but, at the same time, a physique which *visually* reproduces the gendered aesthetic-adjudicative criteria favoured within their competitive division. Unlike their non-competitive compatriots, the task of the competitive bodybuilder is to craft in training and on stage a visual mirage of flesh within multiple overlapping fields of vision, including, the *gaze* of the audience and the adjudicative *eye* of the judging panel.

Through their (pseudo)scientific knowledge of physiology, nutrition, pharmacology, and exercise, competitive bodybuilders must also develop a "visual understanding of muscularity" (Staszal, 2009, p. 6). From the subcultural parlance and adjudicative language

¹⁰⁸ I describe the peculiar features which compose this "look" in greater detail in Chapter 1, subsection 1.1.2.

used to describe the aesthetic value of muscle¹⁰⁹, to the competitive practices used to enhance and manipulate the visible appearance of muscle¹¹⁰; competitive bodybuilding places a high premium on “the visual dimension of the human body” (Klein, 1985b, p. 69).

In considering both the broader subcultural influence (Dutton & Laura, 1989) and more immediate competitive uses (Probert, 2009) of photography to competitive bodybuilders, it is surprising that relatively few bodybuilding studies have ever used photography as a research method. Although photo-images of bodybuilders have featured in academic critiques of bodybuilding subculture¹¹¹; qualitative research which involves the participation of bodybuilders has tended towards more textual methods of: (1) data collection, such as, in ethnography and interviews (e.g. Klein, 1993a); (2) data analysis, such as, in forms of discursive and narrative analysis (e.g. Locks & Richardson, 2012); and (3) data representation, such as, in written observations from field notes and transcribed interview exchanges (e.g. Monaghan, 2001).

Interestingly, two studies which stand out in their use of autophotography are Probert’s (2009) work with male (and female) competitive bodybuilders in NZ; and Phoenix’s (2010) study of mature bodybuilders in the UK. While Probert (2009) justified incorporating autophotography into her study on the grounds that it complemented “the aesthetic nature of bodybuilding and its extensive use of photography at competitive events” (p. 134); Phoenix (2010) argued that bodybuilder-produced photographs demonstrated what bodybuilders’ “value, what images they prefer, how they make sense of their world, and how they conceive of others” (p. 168). Interestingly, both Probert (2009) and Phoenix’s (2010) work demonstrate the value of autophotography in getting bodybuilders themselves to

¹⁰⁹ Such as in descriptions of muscle as “hard” or “dry”, and descriptions of physiques as “cut” or “ripped”.

¹¹⁰ Such as in techniques of flexing and posing, the use of bronzing cremes and tanning, and body hair depilation.

¹¹¹ This work often includes photographic and other images of bodybuilders as visual references which attest to bodybuilders’ accretion of muscle mass, their minimal levels of bodyfat, and the gendered construction of their muscularities. See, for example, Liokaftos (2012).

generate photographic material. This cannot be taken for granted, especially considering that competitive bodybuilding communities typically remain relatively enclosed and often hesitant towards participating in research¹¹² (Mosley, 2009).

With that said, moving beyond the humanocentric orbit of competitive bodybuilding may prove difficult with photographic methods. The obstacle here remains the way in which bodybuilding subculturally encodes the bodybuilder as a Cartesian subject whose body must be treated as an object to be disciplined into submission (Bjørnstad et al., 2014; Fussell, 1991; Klein, 1993a). To this effect, photography and photographs become an indispensable tool in helping bodybuilders' visually (re)fashion their flesh to meet the competitively prescribed aesthetics. The potential therefore exists for photographic methods to be subculturally co-opted by bodybuilders in reiterating the objectified state of their bodies and their bodily materiality.

In this regard, it is particularly worth noting Phoenix's (2010) application of autophotography. In her study, participating bodybuilders produced photographs which brought into focus a host of more-than-human others involved in constituting their identities as competitive bodybuilders, such as, grocery bags of food, protein supplement products, and gym equipment. However, while Phoenix's (2010) study attested to the value of autophotography in highlighting the significance of other more-than-human materialities in the competitive lives of bodybuilders; it is important to note that Phoenix (2010) went on to explore these insights through a human-centred phenomenological orientation which subtly reduced the material agency of these more-than-humans to a collection of resources whose significance was predicated on the roles they played in the service of the participating bodybuilders' "identity construction" (p. 169). What this reveals, is that maintaining a methodology and analytic that exceptionalises human subjectivity disposes bodybuilders' use

¹¹² At least hesitant to researchers from outside of the subculture.

of photography to being potentially complicit in the very same way they narcissistically neutralise the agencies of those more-than-human materialities that also participate in building and gendering their bodies.

It is, in this regard, that I consider the posthumanist approach prompted by trans-corporeality to be far more promising in extending the use(fulness) and insights of autophotography with competitive male bodybuilders, especially in ways which enable a more capacious exploration of how competitive male bodybuilders' more-than-human world(s) (intra-)actively co-participate in the material and gender(ed) building of their muscle.

4.2. From humanocentric to posthumanist research practices: Setting a post-qualitative research-assemblage in motion.

According to Ulmer (2017), as various forms of posthumanist theorising increasingly co-implicate the materialities of the more-than-human world as vital co-constituents in so-called “human” life and livelihood, so too must this be met with “methodological thinking [that] respond[s] in kind by fostering similar interconnections” (p. 3). In one such effort, Fox and Alldred (2015) have proposed rethinking “research as *assemblage*”¹¹³ (p. 400, emphasis original). For Fox and Alldred (2015), the “research-assemblage ... comprises the bodies, things and abstractions that get caught up in ... inquiry, including the events that are studied, the tools, models and precepts of research, and the researchers” (p. 400). Thus, unlike the representationalist machine of conventional qualitative research which works to divide (through methods of collection) and extract (through methods of analysis) “data” for (re)presentation; the research-assemblage acts more like, to borrow the words of Augustine

¹¹³ This is based on Fox and Alldred's (2015) reading of the “DeleuzoGuattarian view of assemblages as ‘machines’ that link elements together affectively to do something, to produce something” (p. 403, quotations original).

(2014), “a kind of great connecting machine” (p. 750) which performatively pulls together both “the human” and “the more-than-human” dimensions of research.

Such a process, according to St. Pierre (2014), makes “qualitative methodology and its grid of normalizing humanist concepts” (p. 10), such as, “method”, “analysis”, and “data”, not only difficult to conceptually and practically designate, but, also, somewhat suspect – for they prescribe a kind of discursive certainty and linearity that ignores what Lather (2007) has more accurately described as “the messy doings” (p. 39) of research. This is, in many ways, where the methodological and analytical potential of a “post-qualitative inquiry” (Lather, 2016b; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; MacLure, 2013; St. Pierre, 2011, 2013) has become increasingly valuable to posthumanist researchers¹¹⁴.

Although the idea of a “post-qualitative”¹¹⁵ trajectory of research has been acknowledged by St. Pierre (2014) as a “rather large and ambiguous term” (p. 3); it emerged, over the past ten years, from an accumulating desire to begin working beyond the “conventional humanist qualitative methodology described in textbooks and handbooks and university research courses” (St. Pierre, 2017, p. 148). In “breaking [the] methodological routine” (Lather, 2013, p. 642) of conventional qualitative methodology, post-qualitative work has sought to “crack open” those concepts which have long underwritten the epistemological and ontological security of the Hu/Man(ist) subject in the language and practices of social science research, such as, “voice, subjectivity, seeing, reflexivity, documentation, data, and interviewing, to name a few” (Myers, 2015, p. 8). By putting into question what any these “should look like, sound like, feel like, or be like” (Myers, 2015, p. 8), post-qualitative researchers have endeavoured to work new, creative, and unexpected

¹¹⁴ It is important to recognise that posthumanist and post-qualitative approaches are not necessarily analogous in their methodological application. Thus, while writers and researchers who employ posthumanist and post-qualitative methodologies may share a political and ethical desire to “produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently” (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 175); I have often found posthumanism to be articulated more commonly in terms of a broader methodological orientation to empirical work, with a post-qualitative approach employed in the actual methodo-analytical praxis of posthumanist research.

¹¹⁵ Sometimes written as one word, “postqualitative”, and, as two words, “post qualitative”.

reconfigurations of what (e)merges with/in the interfolding ideas, bodies, relations, agencies, and practices of research.

With that said, it is important to understand that St. Pierre (2014) is not suggesting “that the structure of humanist qualitative methodology is wrong or in error ... [but] that its assumptions about the nature of inquiry are grounded in Enlightenment humanism’s description of human being, of language, of the material, the empirical, the real, of knowledge, power, freedom, ... and, therefore, are incommensurable with the descriptions of those concepts in the posts” (p. 5). To this effect, a post-qualitative inquiry does not necessarily reject outright the (past, present, and future) utility of conventional qualitative methods, but, rather, draws “important insights from qualitative methodologies but slightly shifts the focus to include both human and nonhuman agency in the production” (Bodén, 2016, p. 49) of those relations which come to co-constitute *who* (or *what*) is studied, as well as *how* (and *when*) they are studied.

In this regard, the aim throughout the remaining pages of this chapter is not to provide a “methodological cookbook” of neatly defined steps and techniques of so-called “data collection” and “data analysis”, but, rather, to (re)story as best as I can (with/in the his/tory and limitations of my own methodological vocabulary) the “dynamic, mutant, shifting” (Ferrando, 2013a, p. 181) research-assemblage that characterised the methodological work of this study.

4.2.1. Taking pictures: The process, the participants, and some unexpected co-participants.

Rather than following a set of technocratic qualitative research procedures which methodically corral together a sample of humans from which to extract coded meanings and thematised experiences generalisable to broader populations of humans; posthumanist

research practices ultimately endeavour to explore those more-than↔human entanglements which are often not representative nor easily re-presentable¹¹⁶ (Fairchild, 2017). Undoing the humanocentric biases that are so often inbred to the representationalist logic of conventional qualitative research requires questioning the methodological and analytical centrality and certainty of a so-called “sample” of solely human research participants. Post-qualitative, posthumanist research practices entail asking, as Honan (2014) does: “What is a sample?” (p. 4).

Thus, with little intention of finding a “standardised sample” of competitive male bodybuilders that would be representative of their broader community in South Africa; I adopted an approach to recruiting participants with only one criterion guiding their potential enrolment: they had to be actively competitive and, therefore, engaged in the practices that mark the material and gendered development of muscle for competition. To this effect, I set about making contact with prospective participants through the assistance of several acquaintances¹¹⁷ within the local competitive community that I had, by happenstance, built up over several years as, at first, a recreational weightlifter at a local bodybuilding gym and, later, an avid follower of the South African competitive scene.

From the outset, I became reliant on these contacts to help navigate access to competitive male bodybuilders whom I did not have a direct relationship with, in particular: (1) bodybuilders who lived, trained, and competed in towns, cities, and provinces outside of my more immediate geographic vicinity; and (2) bodybuilders who competed at more senior, professional, and international levels. Often my initial communication with prospective

¹¹⁶ It is, in this regard, that the analytical work outlined in Chapters Five and Six resist (re)presenting generalised/able themes amongst and between the participating bodybuilders, their autophotographs, and our photo-encounters. Rather, the analyses identify particular instances of analytic interest which are explored for depth and breadth. What this has meant is that not all the bodybuilders who participated in this study had their autophotographic or photo-encounter contributions included in this final PhD dissertation. With that said, their participation and biographies are still registered in Appendix G in recognition of their involvement in this study and future academic work which may arise it.

¹¹⁷ Including, bodybuilding administrators and judges, as well as bodybuilders themselves.

participants had been preceded by my contacts already having vouched for me and forewarned of my correspondence. In each of the initial communications I included a research invitation which briefly outlined the aim of the study, and what participation would likely entail¹¹⁸. For the most part, bodybuilders whom I contacted responded positively to my invitation to participate; some, however, did not wish to participate, often due to a lack of availability.

After a month of having initiated recruitment, I had secured a commitment to participate from 30 male bodybuilders who were actively competing on the South African circuit, at least at the time of this study¹¹⁹. At this point, I halted the enrolment of more participants in large part owing to my satisfaction with a collection of South African bodybuilders who proved to be remarkably heterogeneous in: (1) their personal profiles, such as, age, race, occupation, employment status, and regional geographic location; and (2) their competitive profiles, such as, competitive body weight and division, length of competitive career, level of competitive ambition and commitment, amount of competitive success, access to competitive sponsorship, and degree of celebrity on the local competitive scene.

Once a bodybuilder had indicated their willingness to participate I arranged a meeting where I could: (1) more formally discuss the aims, rationale, and processes of this study; (2) provide the participant with a Participant Information and Consent Form (PICF) as a written record for the participant's consent¹²⁰; (3) field questions from the participant about the study or their participation in it; (4) highlight important ethical matters pertaining to how the study would be conducted, including, the ethical review and clearance obtained from the University of Cape Town (UCT); and (5) initiate the autophotographic component of the study.

¹¹⁸ See Appendix I.

¹¹⁹ See Appendix G.

¹²⁰ See Appendix J.

Once a participant had signed their PICF, a brief discussion about their prospective autophotography took place. As part of this discussion I provided the participant with a disposable camera and an accompanying leaflet¹²¹. In the leaflet I sought to provide each bodybuilder with a clear, concise, and relatively non-prescriptive set of directions for their autophotography. Through the iterative process of (re)formulating the wording of the leaflet I also provided myself with an opportunity to translate the theoretically wordy research question(s) for this study into a practical and accessible focal “theme” that would, at first, orientate each of the participating bodybuilders’ autophotographic work, and, later, guide our photo-encounter sessions.

As per the leaflet, each of the participating bodybuilders were invited to take photographs which: “show how you build and develop your muscle(s) to compete in men’s bodybuilding”¹²². In wording this focal theme, I endeavoured to draw each bodybuilders’ focus to *how* their muscle is competitively built. In doing so, I attempted to emphasise their autophotographic attention on those *practices* which constitute their competitive muscle-building and, to this effect, the multifaceted *processes* through which their muscle is materially (and discursively) developed and gendered, in order to compete in men’s bodybuilding.

In determining the need for other instructions to be contained in the leaflet, care was taken not to restrict participants’ autophotographic work by, for example, specifying the number photographs which should be taken, or what the contents of the photographs should feature. While these points were often raised by participants during our pre-autophotography discussion; I typically kept my responses open-ended and encouraged each participant to make those decisions as they went about doing their autophotographic work. This I considered to be an important part of the post-qualitative ethos of this study. In adopting a

¹²¹ See Appendix K.

¹²² See Appendix K.

less rigid and less “methodocentric”¹²³ (Weaver & Snaza, 2017, p. 1058) approach to participants’ research practices, I was far more interested in allowing research methods to be set in motion *with* participants in an effort to generate autophotographs *through* their own experiences, relations, and connections *across* the range of competitive practices they pursued in building muscle; as opposed to imposing potentially constricting methodological edicts which may (mis)direct their attention to the technical execution of autophotography as a research method.

With that said, one point that was explicitly emphasised in both our discussion and the leaflet was the need for participants to request the permission of any other people who, wittingly or unwittingly, may appear in their autophotographs. In this regard, the pre-autophotography session was used to reiterate both the practical and ethical uses of bodybuilders’ cameras; with participants being encouraged to contact me (or my doctoral supervisors) directly or refer any other affected person/party to me (or my doctoral supervisors) in the event of any ethical or consent-related dilemmas that may involve their photography.

Interestingly, the participating bodybuilders required very little explanation on the use of their disposable cameras. In fact, many of the participants would sarcastically and flippantly balk at my offer to clarify the technical use and functionalities of their cameras. Drawing from their regular exposure to cameras and photography, it was obvious that all the bodybuilders participating in this study were skilled in their use of cameras and the practice of photography.

¹²³ Weaver and Snaza (2017) define methodocentrism as the institutionalised belief that “the method one chooses to guide research determines its truth, its legitimacy, its validity, and its trustworthiness” (p. 1056). For Weaver and Snaza (2017), methodocentrism is deeply implicated in the ways that over-planned and over-determined methodologies reaffirm humanocentric biases in research by blinding human participants to the rich, lively, and unexpected encounters they have with their more-than-human world(s). This, however, does not necessarily mean abandoning any semblance of “method” in research practice, but, rather, exploiting the creative and exploratory potential of methods by allowing them to roam a little more freely *with* participants.

While all the participants responded enthusiastically to my request to take photographs as part of this study; I was surprised by the overwhelmingly reluctant response at having their autophotographic contributions included in any publicly-available published document emerging from this study. This concern was formally registered by the participating bodybuilders in a section of the PICF¹²⁴ requesting their consent to how they would like their photographs to be managed at different points in the prospective research process¹²⁵:

I agree (30)	Do not agree (0)	To have my photos used for discussion in the interviews, as long as my identity is protected.
I agree (30)	Do not agree (0)	To have my photos used for publication in the final thesis document, as long as my identity is protected.
I agree (2)	Do not agree (28)	To have my photos used for publication in articles and journal publications based on this research, as long as my identity is protected.

Despite my assurances that the participants would have their faces and the faces of other people in their photographs blurred so that they could not be identified and, moreover, that this editing process would involve their discretion; the majority of bodybuilders still remained hesitant to have their photographs included in publicly-available articles and journal publications.

In discussing with participants the reasons for their reluctance it became clear that most were anxious not only about their faces being identified, but, also, their physiques or features¹²⁶ of their physiques being recognisable to other bodybuilders as well as administrators, judges, and sponsors, both in and associated to the competitive bodybuilding community. While perhaps sounding strange to those unfamiliar to the world of competitive

¹²⁴ See Appendix J, section 6. By building this consent agreement into the PICF I was weary not to put participants in the position of having to make an all-encompassing and generalised consent decision. Rather, the step-by-step process of consenting allowed me to explain to each participant the different implications their consent might entail at different stages of the study.

¹²⁵ Participant responses are bolded in brackets.

¹²⁶ Such as, noticeable birthmarks, scars, and tattoos.

bodybuilding; this is not necessarily an unusual concern to be raised by bodybuilders. In fact, Monaghan (2001) has observed that as bodybuilders cultivate their ability to visually differentiate and define different kinds of competitive muscularities they come to rely on “a process of identification” (p. 79) which directly associates other (often more well-known) bodybuilders’ bodies as visual referents for different types of physiques. In other words, competitive bodybuilders study the bodies of other competitive bodybuilders. In this regard, many participants stressed that the relatively small size of South Africa’s competitive bodybuilding community meant that photographs of their physiques could be easily recognisable and therefore “disclose” their participation in this study, especially for the participants who had achieved a level of national and international recognition.

What is important to clarify here is that it was not so much the act of participating in this study that many of the bodybuilders considered problematic, but, rather, their potential association to: (1) competitive practices which were recognised as relatively unhealthy, such as, extreme dieting; and (2) competitive practices that violate the rules of local and international bodybuilding organisations which play host to the competitive circuit in South Africa, such as, steroid use. This was a particular concern for those bodybuilders who either had their own fitness, nutritional, and lifestyle-aligned businesses, and for those who were sponsored by companies whose exercise and nutritional products were linked to “healthy lifestyle” practices – not socially pejorative and potentially illegal bodybuilding practices.

In light of the participating bodybuilders’ concerns, I decided to develop an autophotographic album which would only be made available to the examiners of this thesis. This album would act as a repository for those photographs that would ultimately be included in the examined and final corrected version of the thesis. In effect, this would ensure that the

thesis would still be publishable online in accordance with UCT's open access policy¹²⁷; while, at the same time, respecting participants' concerns about the management of their photographic contributions and rights to anonymity. None of the participating bodybuilders' autophotographs therefore appear in hard or electronic copies of this thesis.

At the conclusion of our pre-autophotography discussion, I requested each participant to conduct their autophotographic work over the next two weeks; a period of time which I hoped would be sufficient in capturing the full range of more routine and everyday competitive practices this study focusses on. From the recruitment of the first participant to the submission of photographic work by the final participant, the autophotographic component of this study lasted roughly 9 months. While meeting and formalising enrolment with each of the participating bodybuilders throughout this time, their autophotographic work was initiated over different periods stretching across a significant portion of the local competitive calendar¹²⁸. Thus, not limited to a single training or contest period, each participant's photographic contributions spanned a diverse and rich range of competitive practices, including: different phases of training, such as, the bulking and cutting stages of dieting; different contests on regional, provincial, national, and international stages; and different competitive experiences, including, competitive achievements as well as failures.

However, as I gradually collected participants' disposable cameras throughout the autophotographic phase of this study I was recurrently confronted by two surprising developments. First of which was that many of the bodybuilders had enthusiastically and thoughtfully embarked on autophotographic work. Many had captured not only an

¹²⁷ In June 2014, UCT adopted an open access policy which requires all student research theses and dissertations to be made publicly available on "OpenUCT", an online institutional repository. More information about this policy is available at <http://www.openaccess.lib.uct.ac.za/>

¹²⁸ As competitive bodybuilding has grown in South Africa over the last two decades so too has the competitive calendar become increasingly populated by tournaments hosted by different bodybuilding organisations. To this effect, the competitive calendar for most bodybuilders in South Africa is no longer "seasonal" but in fact runs all year round with two-to-three competitive events each month.

unexpected number of photographs¹²⁹, but, also, some immensely thoughtful and personal experiences. Second, and perhaps more surprising, was that many of the bodybuilders had in fact completely discarded their disposable cameras, in favour of their own digital photographic devices.

From digital cameras to cellular telephones and other “smart” devices with built-in cameras; a host of high-definition gadgets had been used to unceremoniously relieve my disposable cameras of their role in this research¹³⁰. When discussing with each of the participants who had (completely or partially) dumped their disposable cameras, some common reasons for this decision were often cited, including: (1) unhappiness with the limited number of photographs capable of being captured by the disposable camera; (2) dissatisfaction with the perceived poorer quality of the photographic image produced by a disposable camera; (3) frustration with what were considered inadequate functional capabilities of the disposable camera, such as, no zooming ability or flash; and (4) concerns about having photographs capture their physique in an aesthetically unflattering state – especially if the participant felt their physique looked “flat” or “soft” at the time of the photograph. From these discussions, it was clear that many of the participants expressed a desire to have a greater degree of control over the quality and composition of the autophotographs they would submit, as well as how their bodies actually appeared in the autophotographs.

In considering this development, I was immediately left wondering about the extent to which some of the autophotographs may have been digitally (re)edited. However, what also became increasingly apparent were the ways in which the disposable cameras had themselves come to (intra-)actively co-participate in their relations with bodybuilders, specifically, and

¹²⁹ See Appendix L which outlines each of the participating bodybuilders’ the autophotographic contributions.

¹³⁰ Out of the 30 participants, 17 had completely discarded their disposable cameras while 7 had used both the disposable camera and other digital devices. This left only 6 participants who solely used their disposable camera.

with this study, more broadly. This had happened in ways that I had previously not considered in what I soon realised were my own humanocentric biases when I set about supplying the participating bodybuilders with disposable cameras – the assumption that only the human bodybuilders of this study were going to participate in producing photographs.

In discussion with many of the participants it was apparent that the materiality of their disposable cameras had come to matter in their autophotographic research practices. One recurrent example of this was through the material affordances and limitations of the disposable camera's technical functionalities. Here, the disposable camera's lack of image-enhancing capabilities were believed not to be capable of materially rendering visually legible photographic images that clearly captured the hard-earned muscularity and definition that participants had amassed through months and years of gruelling weight training.

In this regard, I became increasingly attuned to how the participating bodybuilders' bodies also co-participated in their autophotographic practices. Digital, high-definition photography is what bodybuilders and their bodies have come to demand. Digital photography has become the standard form of photographic representation in the modern-day world of competitive bodybuilding; for the primary reason that it is a far more superior medium through which to capture (and enhance) the aesthetic appearance of bodybuilders' muscular development. To this effect, concerns about the likelihood of disposable cameras producing photographic images that were either "blurry" or "fuzzy" and, therefore, obscured the material definition of participants' muscular development, was not only personally unpalatable for many of the participants, but, at the same time, was subculturally heretical to one of the key tenets of competitive bodybuilding practice – maximising the "overall visual impact" (Monaghan, 2001, p. 79) of the body.

Disposable cameras were however not alone in co-shaping bodybuilders' autophotography; in fact, the digital devices that many of the participants had turned to also

exerted unexpected agencies through their photographic practices¹³¹. Here, the power of digital cameras to produce instantly available high-definition images also rendered crystal-clear indices of participants' perceived shortcomings in the development of their physiques. It was not uncommon for participants to disclose that they had restaged and reshot photographs, especially when doing autophotographic work as they trained. In this regard, it was clear that presence of cameras often intra-actively materialised an affective/affecting character that, in some instances, affirmed their muscle-building practices and, in others, significantly disrupted them. Where some participants reported that the camera had made them work harder in an effort to enhance their physical appearance in preparation for a photograph; others had said the camera acted as a source of frustration which persistently highlighted alleged flaws in the size and shape of parts of their bodies.

Yet, cameras did not only invite bodybuilders' bodies¹³² to co-participate in their autophotographic work; they had also encouraged bodybuilders to *feel* their way through their autophotography. In this regard, photographs were captured not only on the basis of how bodies looked, but, also, how bodies felt. Often, I was told, that it was only when their muscle was thick and heavy with a blood-engorged pump; or only when their body had been sufficiently dieted down or dehydrated that skin clung tightly to the finely-etched granular details of muscle; or only when their muscle was quivering from the ongoing strain of some contortionary pose did it, to quote one participant, "feel right" to take a photograph.

Having listened to the experiences that each of the bodybuilders reported about their autophotographic work, it became increasingly apparent that the disposable and digital cameras were not simply "used" as inert technographic devices to take photographs, and nor were their bodies involved as passive objects of their autophotography. Rather,

¹³¹ A good example of this can also be seen in Änggård's (2015) work on the active agency and materiality of cameras in her participatory photographic research with children.

¹³² At the same time, it is also worth noting that other human bodies were also invited to co-participate in autophotographic work. Training buddies, fellow competitors, family members, and friends, not only featured in photographs but were also often called on to help take photographs involving the participating bodybuilder.

autophotographic work had entailed dynamic (re)configurations of intra-acting relations for each of the participants with other unexpected co-participants, including, their camera(s) and their body. In doing so, I found that the photographic work I had come to collect from each of the participating bodybuilders had in fact been co-produced through a materially shifting research-assemblage of human and more-than-human bodies, discursive influences, and affectively embodied sensibilities.

4.2.2. Thinking *with* photographic material: From photo-elicitations to photo-encounters.

As I collected each bodybuilder's disposable camera, or the memory card of their digital device; I arranged for follow-up meetings to be held with each participant in order to discuss their autophotographs¹³³. Although it has become almost standard practice in qualitative forms of autophotography to pursue such discussions, often in the form of photo-elicitation interviews¹³⁴ (Glaw, Inder, Kable, & Hazelton, 2017); the conventional practice of interviewing, generally, and photo-elicitation, more specifically, has been criticised within posthumanist research for reinscribing problematic modes of ocularcentrism, discursivism, and humanocentrism (Bodén, 2015b; Koro-Ljungberg & Mazzei, 2012; Kuntz & Presnall, 2012; Petersen, 2014; Warfield, 2017).

¹³³ For the most part, I was able to secure follow-up meetings with each bodybuilder roughly one-to-two weeks after they had completed their autophotography. During this time, I had two sets of photographs developed and/or printed from each bodybuilder's collection of autophotographs: one set for my use in this research; and one set as physical copy for the participant.

¹³⁴ According to Harper (2002), photo-elicitation interviewing is based on the "simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview" (p. 13). It is a technique which can be traced to the formative work of the visual anthropologist Collier Jr (1957, 1967) and, following him, the visual sociologists Wagner (1979), Harper (1986, 1987, 1988), and Schwartz (1989), on coupling photographs to interviews. Over the years, the combined use of autophotography and photo-elicitation has been adapted by different practitioners for different ends. These combinations have also come to be known under different names, including, "auto-driven photography" (Heisley & Levy, 1991), "photo-novella" (Wang & Burris, 1994), "photovoice" (Wang & Burris, 1997), "reflexive photography" (Douglas, 1998), "photo-interviewing" (Hurworth, 2003), "photo-narrative" (Langa, 2008), and "participatory photography" (Bryne, Daykin, & Coad, 2016).

In Western academia, ocularcentric research practices have historically underwritten quantitative and qualitative traditions of research through the institutionalised belief that “data need[s] to be ‘seen’ in order to be ‘believed’ ” (Dowling, Lloyd, & Suchet-Pearson, 2017, p. 5, quotations original). The visually legible rendering of research, be it through pictures or text, has often meant that other bodily senses have had their co-participation in the methodological and analytical work of research either minimised or completely occluded (Pink, 2009; Stoller, 1997). For Donna Haraway (1988), this is how the researcher’s sense of sight has come to participate in “the god trick” (p. 581) of scientific inquiry within a traditionally White, male, and Euro-American academy. Rather than a neutral spectator, the researcher’s eye is metaphorically suffused with masculinist and positivist tropes of detachment from the research(ed). While this not only constitutes a hierarchical and dualistic relationship between “the researcher” and “the research(ed)”; it also transforms the researcher’s sense of vision into a colonial and authoritative gaze whose apparent “distance” from the research(ed) doubles as “objectivity” (Murriss, 2017).

In addition to this, it has been suggested that photo-elicitation continues to underscore an ongoing deference to the supremacy of discourse and, more narrowly, verbal and textual translations of photographic material (Pyry, 2015). According to Pyry (2015), the process of photo-elicitation ultimately aims to “draw out information from ... photographs” (p. 157). In doing so, photo-elicitation comes to function like another cog in the representationalist machine of conventional qualitative research which generates elicitations to be captured (through audio-recording), extracted (through transcription), and coded (through analysis), in endless chains of language. In other words, photo-elicitation renders the “photograph as garnish” (Martin & Martin, 2004, p. 9); in effect, reducing the photograph to the status of a mere “prompt” (Noland, 2006, p. 4) or “stimulus” (Griebeling et al., 2013, p. 19) for the more valued elicitations about what is pictured.

In this regard, photo-elicitation comes to settle neatly within the traditional human-to-human structure of a research interview. In doing so, the photo-elicitation interview impresses a methodological and analytical focus on a successful exchange of words between the researcher and research participant. It is this human-centred configuration which not only reinstalls two bounded human subjects at the centre of the research interview, but, at the same time, ordains the *human* eye and the *human* voice as the primary interpretative tools of photographic research; leaving all the more-than-human materialities of the research process, including, the photographic material, to be “habitually treated as ancillary and supplementary sources, used to get a deeper understanding of the human participants” (Bodén, 2015b, p. 197).

With these concerns in mind, Pyyry (2015) has argued in favour of rethinking the photo-elicitation interview as a more materially and affectively attuned photo-encounter¹³⁵. Unlike photo-elicitation, a photo-encounter is not so much a staccato process of looking-at-and-then-talking-about-photographs as it is a dynamic “event of ‘thinking with’ photographs” (p. 159, quotations original). For Pyyry (2015), this acknowledges that photographs “have a capacity to affect us” (p. 150), often in ways which escape or exceed visual perceptibility. In doing so, photo-encounters come to act as an exploratory research practice as part of which photographic material affectively inter-connects with an array of corporeal registers and sensibilities (Pyyry, 2015); mobilising a wholly embodied and multi-sensory mode of engagement by both the researcher and the research participant with one another, as well as with the materialities of, for example, the research setting as well as the photographs (Pyyry, 2015).

In this regard, photo-encounters encourage an attunement to the ways in which *material* (such as, the human and more-than-human bodies assembled in the research

¹³⁵ While Pyyry (2015) proposes to rethink “photo-talks as encounters” (p. 157), she does not use the term “photo-encounter”. I have introduced this term as a terminological abridgement of her idea.

encounter), *discursive* (such as, the overarching research question(s) informing the analytical orientation towards the research encounter), and *affective* (such as, those (un)consciously embodied sensations and intensities experienced in the research encounter) forces intra-actively and trans-corporeally gather, flow, congeal, and disperse through the photo-encounter(s) and, in so doing, (re)shaping the trajectory and tempo of research as well as the human and more-than-human co-participants. To this effect, photo-encounters do not function, in the strictest sense, as research “method”, but, rather, are more like a hybrid “methodo↔analytical” practice that always already begins to perform the work of “analysis” by enabling photographic material to “give a ‘push’ to thinking and deepen one’s engagement with the world (and the research process)” (Pyry, 2015, p. 153, quotations original).

Thus, in setting up photo-encounters with each of the participating bodybuilders, a date, time, and place, convenient for them was arranged. While these meetings were held in a variety of different places¹³⁶; a private office, room, or space was always pre-arranged as the venue for our discussion¹³⁷. At the start of every photo-encounter I reminded each bodybuilder about their rights to continuing to participate in this study and, in particular, the audio-recording and transcription processes that would be entailed in and follow from our discussions. Once these ethical matters had been clarified, I proceeded to lay out all the developed/printed photographs that a participant had submitted. While I had intended to begin our conversations with the same focal question that had orientated each participant’s autophotography¹³⁸; I found that almost every participant tended to spontaneously initiate our photo-encounters by gesturing towards or picking-up one of their photographs – leaving me to hurriedly activate my audio-recorder.

¹³⁶ Including the gym where a participant trained (20), their personal residence (7), or their workplace (3).

¹³⁷ In doing so, I sought to continue safeguarding each bodybuilder’s anonymous participation in this study whilst ensuring privacy around how their photographic contributions were going to be handled during our meetings.

¹³⁸ See Appendix K.

Although most of our photo-encounters typically began in quite conventional configurations, that is, with myself and a participant seated at a table with all their photographs packed out in front of us – the photographs hardly ever remained that way for very long. With almost every photo-encounter, either a participant or I would be affected enough to reach out to a photograph. In this regard, it was not uncommon for us to *look at* a photograph whilst, at the same time, *talk about* a photograph – an event which was often always marked by one or both of us *holding* a photograph and, in turn, *talking with* it in hand.

Sight, alone, was never a sufficient sense for working through our photo-encounters. For the most part, the meetings in which our photo-encounters took place often evolved through a more multi-sensory *more-than-looking*: a *looking-with-touching* photographs; a *looking-with-tasting* a protein-shake which had been brought along to a meeting; a *looking-with-smelling* containers of steamed broccoli and sautéed chicken¹³⁹; and a *looking-with-hearing* deeply personal stories of pain, sacrifice, and joy tied to their competitive careers and lifestyles.

At the same time, human voices were not the only voices heard during our photo-encounters. When photo-encounters were held at a participant's preferred gym, it was not uncommon for the sharp clanging of weights to vocally cut through our discussions; for strident grunts and groans of other gym-goers to punctuate our conversations; or for the low vibrating thud of music being played across the gym-wide stereo systems to perforate the space where we met. These sounds often came to ignite new and indeterminate encounters *with* photographic material; performatively working through our photo-encounters in ways which sometimes competed for our attention and in ways which sometimes triggered (re)connections to experiences of each bodybuilder's competitive muscle-building practices.

¹³⁹ Many of the participants also brought along food to our meetings in anticipation of not missing any scheduled meal times.

More often than not, I noted how each participant tended to feel through their photographs *with* their bodies, and *with* mine. In this sense, it was not unusual for participants to use their hands or fingers to chart lines of definition across their musculature as we spoke about their body; to touch and hold muscle groups or body parts that appeared in photographs under discussion; to flex a part of their physique that we were talking about; or, to nonchalantly remove or shift an item of clothing they were wearing to show me how particular areas of muscular development had been enhanced since they were captured in a photograph. Often, my body, or parts and dimensions thereof, would also be gestured to or, in a few instances, grabbed, in an attempt to draw attention to the difference in the appearances, textures, and volumes of our disparate physiques and levels muscular development.

At the same time, the competitive readiness of each bodybuilder's physique, generally, and their muscle, more specifically, also came to matter with/in the spatial and temporal arrangements for our meetings. Whether it was having to arrange a meeting in a place that did not interfere with a scheduled training session, such as, the gym; or whether it was having to bring a meeting to an abrupt end to accommodate a participant's scheduled meal time; the material preparation of muscle always mattered to the spacetime(s) of our photo-encounters.

Beyond human bodies, our photo-encounters also often reassembled and reconfigured the more-than-human bodies which came to co-participate in our meetings. A common example of this were moments when photo-images of a bodybuilder's nutritional supplements, AASs, or PPEs would move them enough to leave the room or space we were sitting in only to return some minutes later with that very product or item in hand. Fished from the seclusion of a gym bag, the material presence of these more-than-human muscle-builders often sparked more extensive explorations of their own histories and their contribution to a participant's body of muscle.

In feeling my way through each photo-encounter, I too discovered that it became evermore difficult to treat each bodybuilder's collection of autophotographs as a series of visual (re)presentations of their muscle, muscle-building practices, or the more-than-human world(s) significant in the material and gendered development of their bodies for competition. I found myself, along with each of the participating bodybuilders, thinking *with* their photographic material as well as a host of human and more-than-human agencies. In doing so, I did not feel compelled in our photo-encounters to either *look for images* or *listen for words* which "captured" evidence of trans-corporeal relations between the participating bodybuilders and their more-than-human world(s). Instead of (re)searching out neatly identifiable (human) subjects and (more-than-human) objects to constitute even more neatly truncatable extracts of "data"; I focused on cultivating an embodied attunement to the affective intensities and material forces which moved (me) through/with/across each photo-encounter.

4.2.3. Seeing more than just human subjects and human bodies: Tracing maps of trans-corporeal transit.

After meeting with each participant for our photo-encounters I immediately began the work of transcription¹⁴⁰. While I was hesitant to pursue transcription for fear that it would reduce our photo-encounters to "the bloodless language" (Sparkes, 2009, p. 32) characteristic of an interview; I soon realised that transcription would provide me with an opportunity to generate a helpful record of reference for our discussions as well as specific photo-encounters.

Once transcriptions were complete, I began *(re)reading* the transcripts of each photo-encounter whilst, at the same time, *(re)listening* to the audio-recordings and *(re)viewing* notes I had made during each discussion. Through these simultaneously visual, aural, and haptic

¹⁴⁰ See Appendix M for the transcription notation used in Chapters Five and Six.

modes of sensing *with* intersecting forms of narrative, visual, and embodied research material I felt myself be(com)ing pulled to specific photo-encounters where I experienced “a kind of fascination” (MacLure, 2013, p. 228) underpinned not only by my analytical interest in trans-corporeal relations, but, also, by the way in which some photo-encounters grasped and held my attention. In be(com)ing drawn (in)to these moments I found a desire to dwell with particular photo-encounters and, with them, specific autophotographs. In doing so, I engaged these photo-encounters and these photographs more intensively with Alaimo’s work on trans-corporeality.

In working participants’ photographs through trans-corporeality, I sought to “challenge ... [the] anthropocentric ways of seeing that are most often taken for granted” (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 527) in the analytical approach of visual research methodologies. According to Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010), the anthropocentric gaze of Western culture is one which “puts humans above other matter in reality” (p. 526). It is through this culturally ingrained “habit of seeing” (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 525) that photographic research has tended to (re)position humans and human agency at “the centre of attention” (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 526) whilst, at the same time, hierarchically elevating a seemingly coherent and whole human subject above the more-than-human objects, organisms, forces, and places which also come to populate and constitute photographic images.

Despite this history, photography is amongst an increasingly popular set of visually-oriented participatory research methods being used in the development of posthumanist modes of research practice (Allen, 2013c; Higgins, 2016; Lorimer, 2010; Malone, 2015; Osgood & Scarlet/Giugni, 2015). From a posthumanist perspective, photographic methods “use the provocative power of images” (Pitt, 2015, p. 9) to attend to those dynamic material relations that humans have and hold with worlds of more-than-human: organisms, such as,

animals (Smith, 2003) and plants (Archambault, 2016); places, such as, natural (Nxumalo, 2016) and built (Malone, 2016) environments; objects, such as, things (Duncan, Duff, Sebar, & Lee, 2017) and technology (Aspling & Juhlin, 2016); elements, such as, earth (Nxumalo, 2015) and water (Strang, 2014); substances, such as, food (Green & Duhn, 2015); and forces, such as, time (Sørensen, 2007).

Thus, rather than narrowly focussing on “the human” subject or body, trans-corporeality widens the analytical aperture of photographic research through “a posthuman lens” (Quinn, 2016, p. 208). This, however, does not mean that trans-corporeality is blind to the humans or human activities which appear in photographs. In fact, as Alaimo herself has said, trans-corporeality often “begins as an anthropocentric moment” (2011, p. 283) which explicitly brings the human subject and body into sharp focus through a “relentless attention to corporeal substance” (2010a, p. 165). In doing so, this ensures that those more powerful (White, heterosexual, abled-bodied, and male) Hu/Mans, who have historically had their subjectivities and bodies abstracted from the material flows and connections of the world, are brought into deliberate focus and political contention; whilst, at the same time, ensuring that those more marginalised (Black, Queer, disabled, and female) humans do not continue to suffer the violent erasure of their material difference, presence, and experiences. Beyond this, however, trans-corporeality does not leave the human subject or body intact, but, rather, analytically “unravels the Human ... by tracing the material interchanges between each human body and the substances, flows, and forces” (Alaimo, 2011, p. 283) of their more-than-human world(s).

In the iterative and overlapping practices of (re)reading↔(re)thinking↔(re)writing with trans-corporeality through specific photo-encounters and autophotographs I did however often find myself falling back into the optical geometry of an anthropocentric analytic, that is, “looking at the photo ... vertically, or top down, from researcher, down to the image”

(Warfield, 2017, p. 69). For the most part, I found that these moments were coupled to the slippery ways in which my eyes and ears often returned to (re)searching for clearly defined human subjects, human voices, and human bodies. But, in an effort to resist the perceptual pull of anthropocentrism, I attempted the kind of non-hierarchical onto-epistemological posture that Alaimo (2016a) describes as “staying low” (p. 173) with, in this case, the autophotographic material. In doing so, I was able to begin “[r]eading images horizontally” (Warfield, 2017, p. 69) with trans-corporeality in an attempt to not only “see with equal weight the human and non-human elements of the image” (Warfield, 2017, p. 69), but, moreover, map much wider and deeper material↔discursive↔affective relations which were so often densely enfolded with/in the muscle, muscle-building↔gendering practices, and more-than-human world(s) that appeared in participants’ autophotographs.

4.2.4. How working with muscle made me (feel) a little more feminist and a lot more fat: Some personal notes on be(com)ing politically and ethically (re)shaped by the materialities of muscle and fat.

Over the last five-to-ten years, there has been a promising accumulation in the amount of work within the social sciences and humanities which have begun to experiment with post-qualitative ways thinking and doing research¹⁴¹. Through much of this work, brave scholars have discarded the methodological security of institutionalised qualitative research practices which reinstall an ontological gulf between “the researcher” and “the researched” that, according to Mazzei (2013a), renders “researchers ... always already subject and our participants and their material conditions as always already object” (p. 781). In doing so, post-qualitative researchers have begun to chart new courses of inquiry which not only contest, but, also, disband, the Cartesian, colonialist, and patriarchal assumptions that have

¹⁴¹ See recent special issues on post-qualitative inquiry in the following journals: *The International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*; *Qualitative Inquiry*; and *Cultural Studies↔Critical Methodologies*.

his/torically circumscribed researcher subjectivity (and embodiment), in Western academia (St. Pierre, 2014).

The journey of a post-qualitative inquiry is therefore not one which simply *unfolds* through a pre-programmed protocol of qualitative stages, phases, and techniques, but, rather, one which intra-actively *enfolds* its human and more-than-human co-participants as well as their more-than↔human relations in ways which co-constitute one another, simultaneously. Acknowledging this, on my part, has entailed a recognition that as I have journeyed through *and* with the theoretico↔methodo↔analytical practices of this study, so too have these practices journeyed through *and* with me; and just as I have worked “on” the material (trans)formed through this research, so too has this material worked “on” and (trans)formed me in ways I did not expect, and in ways I continue grapple with.

Working with South African competitive male bodybuilders’ bodies over the course of this doctoral research has, above all else, made me think more (and more) about the symbolic violences that male/masculine/men’s bodies, generally, and muscle, more specifically, have been implicated in throughout Western history (Dutton, 1995). Moreover, these bodies have forced me to confront the very real material violences that South African men and their bodies perpetrate on a daily basis (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2004; Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002; Jewkes et al., 2006; Jewkes, Levin, Mbananga, & Bradshaw, 2002; Wood & Jewkes, 1997). As a White South African man who has benefitted from the structural legacies and opportunities of South Africa’s colonial and apartheid past; this study has pushed me to think *with* my own body about how I can take responsibility for the ways in which (racialised and anti-Black forms of) patriarchy live and breathe through me as I mobilise and deploy my own flesh in committing daily habitual misogynies, however unforeseen and unintended these may be. In doing so, this study has pressed me to think *with* my body about the ways in which I can go about be(com)ing a better ally to feminist

scholarship and activism in the struggle for a future where South African women, children, and Other(ed) men do not live with the daily threat of having their bodies subjected to violence¹⁴² (Gqola, 2015).

It is, in this regard, that I was not immune from the intertwining material↔discursive↔affective vicissitudes of working with the muscle of the competitive male bodybuilders participating in this research. Across the four years of this study, I regularly came to feel the gender(ed/ing) power of muscle. Despite having trawled through mountains of critical bodybuilding scholarship which had affirmed for me that the relationship between muscle and men in the competitive bodybuilding community was a subculturally peculiar artefact of Western patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and narcissistic machismo; I was still unable to stop myself from feeling frustrating pangs of gendered and, in particular, masculine, inadequacy.

For the most part, the materiality of my inadequacy felt decidedly like fat. It was not just that my body did not occupy the same volume of space that many of the participants' bodies did¹⁴³, but, rather, that my body did not do so in the same material ways. Where the muscular development and definition of my participants' bodies looked and felt hard, firm, and stable; my own body looked and felt increasingly gelatinous, plump, and, worst of all, soft.

At the outset of my work into this study, I had been a long-committed member of a local bodybuilding gym where I had worked-out for six days a week for about two hours at a time, for almost fifteen years. I was lean, well-built, and muscular; with a lean body-weight of 85kgs and a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 23.2¹⁴⁴. However, as my work into this study

¹⁴² So much so that my own focal interest in the materiality/ies of South African men's bodies has begun to shift away from bodybuilding towards a far more (pro)feminist focus on South African men's sexual violence against women (Martin, 2017a).

¹⁴³ By this I mean I was just as physically tall and my shoulders were just as broad as many of the participants.

¹⁴⁴ BMI is calculated by dividing a person's total bodyweight (in kilograms) by their height (in metres squared). In response to the worldwide increase in rates of obesity the BMI scale emerged as measure used by global

increased while, at the same time, maintaining a full-time job; I was left with increasingly less time to pursue my daily journey to the gym. As the study progressed from the first to the second year, and then to the third year, my attendance at gym waned; two-hour long intense weightlifting sessions became, at first, 1-hour fully-body workouts and, later, thirty minutes of cardiovascular training with no weightlifting; while six days a week turned into five and then three. Even my long-time weightlifting partner of the past ten years had abandoned me in favour of another more committed training partner. By the fourth and final year of this study, my attendance at gym had become non-existent until even my gym membership lapsed.

Throughout this time, my own muscular development, which had until the commencement of my doctoral studies been a gratifying source of self-satisfaction and self-confidence; slowly withered and gradually slipped beneath an increasing layer of adipose tissue. At the same time, as autophotographic material demanded more time and energy to work through so too did I spend more time with it; I sat for longer periods with bodybuilders' autophotographs as well as transcripts and audio-recordings of our photo-encounters. I became more sedentary. In working through this research material new trans-corporeal research-assemblages with food (and wine)¹⁴⁵ also (re)materialised – I suspect as a way of coping with the anxieties, frustrations, and challenges of abandoning the comforting structure of a qualitative methodology in favour of opening my subjectivity, my body, and my position of power and privilege as “the researcher” to the messy, meandering, and nomadic movements of a post-qualitative inquiry. In doing so, my corporeal form was transformed/mogrified through these more-than↔human relations: where I once had two hard

and local health authorities to categorise different bodyweights in terms of their health risk. For the record, the BMI scale has been critiqued as highly problematic (Monaghan, 2008). In this regard, I am not using it here as an indication that I endorse the BMI scale as a measure of health, but, rather, as a superficial indicator for demonstrating my own weight gain. At the start of this study, a BMI score of 23.2 would have classified me as possessing a “healthy weight”.

¹⁴⁵ But, in my defence, South African wine is world-renowned.

pectoral muscles which defined my chest, I now had a pair of rounded supple “man-boobs”; my abdominal musculature had disappeared underneath a gut-like “paunch”; and the outward dimensions of my upper thighs had curved into shapely “saddlebags”, to name only a few such changes. Four years after the start of this study my body-weight was 25kgs heavier, with a BMI of 30¹⁴⁶.

Fat had come to remould the material topography of my body and, in so doing, had also remade my own experience of my sex/gender and sex/uality through my research practices and, with this, my own styles of embodiment (I modified my comportment, posture, and style of walking to minimise the outward appearance of my excessive weight gain); my relationship with clothes (I wore bigger and baggier clothing which did not cling so tightly to my blubbery form); and my interpersonal relationships (I lost contact with a circle of friends which I had developed through our shared love of iron and our committed attendance to our local gym). While muscle had come to (re)make the matter of this thesis; fat had come to (re)shape the matter of my life.

It was, especially during the latter phases of this study, when I sat for hours at a time with photograph-after-photograph of hard thick muscle; where I felt increasingly self-conscious. In analytically building maps of trans-corporeal relations through/with/across participating male bodybuilders’ muscle; I had, at the same time, also built an overwhelming sense of gendered body shame. The loss of my muscularity had marked, in the deeply ingrained socio-perceptual systems of my own vane, gender-binaried, and femiphobic mind, the loss of my masculinity and, as I was to realise later, a sense of my own male/masculine power. My corpulence signified to me a deeply uncomfortable femininity and insecurity: I did not feel as definitively secure in my biologically male body or my masculinity as I did when I started this research. I felt my sex/gender be(com)ing materially undone by fat. I felt

¹⁴⁶ A BMI score of 30 would now classify my bodyweight as “obese”.

vulnerable: vulnerable to the mean-spirited barbs of (now former) friends; vulnerable to the judgemental gaze of colleagues who had witnessed my steady weight gain over the years of my doctoral research; and vulnerable to the gendered and pejorative social statuses of be(com)ing not only an overweight man in a fat-phobic society (Lupton, 2018), but, moreover, an overweight gay man in a contemporary gay culture which places significant commercial power and sexual worth(iness) in looking lean, muscular, and athletic (Filiault & Drummond, 2007).

As I watched my body change through my ongoing work with this study, I found myself turning much more concerted to my research diary in an effort to not just *write about*, but, more pointedly, *write through and with* these changes *with* my research practices. Now, while contemporary qualitative methodology has come to advance the use of research diaries as a tool for researchers to enhance practices of reflection or reflexivity (Nadin & Cassell, 2006); my use of a research diary was primarily prompted by a desire to stimulate writing as a post-qualitative mode of what St. Pierre (2002) describes as “discovery ... a kind of nomadic inquiry in which I am able ... to travel in the thinking that writing produces. As I write, I think, I learn, and I change my mind about what I think” (p. 64).

In so doing, I abandoned the traditional qualitative approach of diary-writing as an exercise in autoethnographic reflexivity, that is, a humanocentric reflection on my own subjectivity and body. According to Bozalek and Zembylas (2016) the conventional mode of qualitative reflexivity “remains fundamentally an inner mental activity in which the researcher supposedly takes a step back and reflects at a distance from the outside of the data ... [presupposing] an ‘I’ who is different and exterior ... an ‘I’ who is separate from the world” (p. 6, quotations original). To this effect, I pursued my diary-writing as an opportunity

to “read/think/see diffractively”¹⁴⁷ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 131) with/in my body through my research practices and the research material. Through a diffractive style of writing I sought to not just discursively and materially situate my subjectivity or my body with/in the methodo↔analytical processes of this study, but, further, to map the ways in which I too could/would/should become “otherwise” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 131) through/with/across the material↔discursive↔affective intra-actions of my work in this study.

Writing about my fat(ness) moved me into thinking with both my own fat as well as the (lack of) fat of the competitive male bodybuilders participating in this study. In turn, this movement got me (re)searching for fat through academic bodies of scholarship. In reading↔thinking↔writing↔feeling fat(ter) I became more closely connected with the (e)merging field of “fat studies”¹⁴⁸ (Rothblum & Solovay, 2009), generally, and the work of feminist fat scholars (Orbach, 1978), in particular. Through the intersecting practices of *writing* through my experiences of weight gain whilst, at the same time, *reading* critical and affirmative feminist literatures on fat, as well as *thinking* with competitive male bodybuilders’ muscular and fat-depleted bodies; my diary-writing slowly became an increasingly transversal, lateral, and rhizomatic mode of analytical practice across which particular autophotographs and photo-encounters could be (re)visited and (re/de/trans-)formed with trans-corporeality.

¹⁴⁷ Although a concept of physics, “diffraction” was first used by Haraway (1992) in an effort to unsettle the unquestioned optical metaphor of “reflection” as the basis for researcher reflexivity. Haraway (1992) argued that diffraction “does not produce ‘the same’ displaced, as reflection and refraction do. Diffraction is a mapping of interference, not of replication, reflection, or reproduction” (p. 300, quotations original). Later, Barad (2007) extended Haraway’s use of diffraction into a “methodological approach ... of reading insights through one another in attending to and responding to the details and specificities of relations of difference and how they matter” (p. 71). Diffractive methodologies have since become almost synonymous with post-qualitative and posthumanist modes of feminist and new material research practice (van der Tuin, 2018).

¹⁴⁸ Fat or critical weight studies is “an interdisciplinary field of scholarship marked by an aggressive, consistent, rigorous critique of the negative assumptions, stereotypes, and stigma placed on fat and the fat body” (Solovay & Rothblum, 2009, p. 2).

To this effect, my diary-writing no longer remained a completely personal affair, that is, an ego-centric ode bemoaning my loss of muscle and, by extension, the gender(ed/ing) power of a muscular and masculine biologically male body. Instead, my writing became increasingly personal↔political; charged with an explicitly feminist-inflected desire *and* responsibility to undo the tropes of hardness, boundedness, and solidness that discursively suffuse male/masculine/men's muscle in competitive bodybuilding, specifically, and in Western(ised) societies, more broadly. In doing so, I sought to embrace my own be(com)ing undone as a muscular male/masculine Hu/Man(ist) subject and body; and, through my writing with trans-corporeality, performatively (re)materialise and embody a "posthumanist ... sense of self as opening out unto the larger material world ... being penetrated by all sorts of substances and material agencies" (Alaimo, 2016a, p. 4), both literally and figuratively.

Thus, over time, I felt that no longer attending gym and no longer building muscle were to no longer be sources of shame, but, rather, a deliberate political act of defiance which affirmatively accepted be(com)ing less muscular, and, simultaneously, more fat, and, perhaps, even a little more feminist. I therefore engaged my own diary-writing through this study as an explicitly feminist posthumanist political and ethical practice with which to analytically aid in trans-corporeally trans-figuring not just my own Hu/Man body, but, also, the bodies and muscle of those male bodybuilders participating in this study.

4.3. A posthumanist and post-qualitative research-assemblage: A summary.

In this chapter I outlined the methodological, analytical, and ethical practices entailed in this study. In doing so, I divided the chapter into two sections through which I unpacked the posthumanist and post-qualitative research-assemblage which enabled me to explore how the trans-corporeal relations between South African competitive male bodybuilders and their more-than-human world(s) materialise and, simultaneously, gender their muscle.

In the first section, I examined the origin and applications of the visual research method of autophotography. Given that autophotography underpins much of the methodological work of this study I discussed the strengths that autophotographic research has demonstrated in cultivating a participant-led and visually creative approach in critical studies which focus on men, their bodies, and their bodily practices; and especially in ways which generatively move beyond solely text-based methods that bring the dynamic matter/material/materiality of male/masculine/men's bodies into critical sight.

Following this, I went on to specifically consider the possibilities and pitfalls of using autophotography with competitive male bodybuilders. For this study, autophotography has proven to be a useful method of research with bodybuilders by virtue of the fact that they regularly use photography in helping them visually (re)build and (re)mould their physiques in ways which more closely embody the gendered aesthetic-adjudicative criteria of their respective competitive divisions. Yet, it is for this very reason that competitive bodybuilders' use of visual mediums, methods, and materials can become an extension of the subculturally-informed humanocentric and Cartesian logics which ultimately render their bodies as isolated objects and their more-than-human world(s) as useful tools in building muscle. It is, in this regard, that I have argued in favour of the feminist-inflected posthumanist approach that a trans-corporeal theorising of the participating bodybuilders' relations with their more-than-human world(s) analytically provokes.

Thus, in the second section, I briefly outlined the overarching assumptions that a posthumanist and post-qualitative methodology entails. Rather than framing the methodological, analytical, and ethical practices of this study in a qualitative research design which underwrites the "humanist human" (St. Pierre, 2015, p. 80) as the methodological and analytical starting-and-ending-point of this research; the work of this study has endeavoured to set in motion a post-qualitative "research-assemblage" (Fox & Alldred, 2015) whose

exploratory (re)search(ing) practices are themselves a performatively ongoing “enactment among researcher-data-participants-theory-analysis” (Mazzei, 2013b, p. 732), working through/with/across one another, together.

To this effect, I started by unpacking the methodological work and ethical considerations that were practically undertaken in recruiting bodybuilders to participate in this study, and in having them conduct autophotographic work about their competitive muscle-building practices. Following this, I introduced and developed the idea of the “photo-encounter” as a posthumanist-inspired conceptual reconfiguration of the photo-elicitation interview. In doing so, I endeavoured to emphasise the ways in which photo-encounters help stimulate a more relational and multi-sensory mode of thinking/sensing/working *with* photographic material, as well as the participating bodybuilders and multi-dimensional aspects of the research setting. Thereafter, I discussed the analytical implications of putting trans-corporeality to work with the autophotographic material. Throughout this study, I have found trans-corporeality to trans-figure/form/mogrify bodybuilders’ photographs into ontologically relational “maps of transit” (Alaimo, 2010a, p. 11). Rather than “unproblematic records of an observed reality” (Roxburgh, 2006, p. 149) populated by unitary human subjects and human bodies at the centre of the photographic frame; trans-corporeality not only helped in decentralising my own anthropocentric gaze, but, further, enabled me to trace through the participating bodybuilders’ photographs the more-than↔human “interconnections, interchanges, and transits” (Alaimo, 2010a, p. 2) which (e)merged between their muscle and their more-than-human world(s). Lastly, I offered some personal notes on my own journey with this study. Here, I foreground how my own materially embodied experiences of be(com)ing politically and ethically trans-formed/mogrified during the course of this study was never just located in my own Hu/Man mind or body, but, in actual fact, became trans-corporeally co-entailed with/in the body of this thesis, through the

intra-active assemblages of (re)thinking↔(re)reading↔(re)writing practices that co-constituted the analytical work of this study.

Following this, in the next two chapters, I unpack the findings of this study. Each of these chapters respectively orientates itself around one of the two primary dimensions of the research question framing the methodological and analytical work of this study, namely: How do the trans-corporeal relations between South African competitive male bodybuilders and their more-than-human world(s) work in (1) *materialising* and (2) *gendering* their muscle, for competitive participation? To this effect, in Chapter Five, I set about exploring how the muscle of competitive male bodybuilders becomes trans-corporeally co-composed through the materialities of their more-than-human world(s). Following this, in Chapter Six, I consider how the material agencies of competitive male bodybuilders' muscle and their more-than-human world(s) co-participate in shaping how their muscle becomes gendered through these trans-corporeal relations.

“He/she tears down his/her muscles on steel, exhausting all his/her force on it, and when muscle failure has been reached, receives from the metal its properties.”

- Alphonso Lingis’s observation provides one the earliest observations of the trans-corporeal character of building muscle in men’s competitive bodybuilding, in *Orchids and Muscles* (1986, p. 28).

CHAPTER 5: BODYBUILDING MORE-THAN↔HUMAN MUSCLE

In this chapter I explore how the material agencies of South African competitive male bodybuilders' more-than-human world(s) come to actively co-participate in their muscle-building↔gendering practices. The aim of this chapter is to address the first dimension of the research question orientating this thesis, namely: How do the trans-corporeal relations between South African competitive male bodybuilders and their more-than-human world(s) work in *materialising* their muscle, for competitive participation?

Working through/with/across trans-corporeality theoretically impels a feminist-inflected and posthumanist challenge of the patriarchal, Cartesian, and Western tropes which have his/torically persisted in abstracting Hu/Man(ist) subjectivity from the materiality/ies of the body and the more-than-human world. In this regard, a trans-corporeal perspective demands a more capacious analytic which encourages an embodied and embedded (re)search which explores and maps the routes of inter-connection which intra-actively materialise through/with/across the human body and the more-than-human world, in ways which are simultaneously material, discursive, and affective. What therefore f(ol)lows from here are six sections of analysis which move towards crafting trans-corporeal “maps of transit” (Alaimo, 2008, p. 253) that chart, in always provisional ways, the ontological entanglements that matter muscle for the competitive male bodybuilders that participated in this study. This is followed by a concluding seventh section.

In the first and second sections, I tackle two Cartesian divisions which have often come to underpin the conceptual formulation of the competitive male bodybuilder's relationship to their body, their muscle, and their more-than-human world(s) in reductionist, dualistic, and hierarchical terms. In the first section, I trans-corporeally trace my way through/with/across the intensely embodied material↔discursive↔affective relations of their mind-body relationship and, in the second section, I conceptually peel away the apparent

bounded impermeability of their skin in a way which attempts to highlight how the material agencies of their more-than-human world(s) trans-corporeally trans-fuse/form/mogrify their muscle and muscle-building practices.

In the third and fourth sections, I move through/with/across more corporeally intimate scales by examining how the materialities of the more-than-human world(s) become the very material substance of the competitive male bodybuilder's body and muscle. In the third section, I focus on the material agencies of food and nutritional supplements, and, in the fourth section, I turn to the stacks of steroids which chemically feed their enhanced muscle accretion.

In the fifth section, I consider how various kinds of gym equipment, long seen as mere inanimate implements for building muscle, become co-entailed in (often affectively intense) ontological assemblages that materially co-produce competitive male bodybuilders' muscle.

Lastly, in the sixth section, I turn to the matter of time and, in particular, how the material force(s) of time come to actively (un/re)make the materialities of muscle through/with/across the hours, days, weeks, and years that male bodybuilders spend in competitively (re)building and (re)shaping their bodies.

In using Stacy Alaimo's work on trans-corporeality to move through/with/across the muscle of competitive male bodybuilders, I hope to not just explore more fully what I contend is a much richer and more complex "co-extensive materiality" (Iovino & Opperman, 2012, p. 85) in the more-than↔human relations which co-constitute muscle, but, at the same time, to examine in greater detail how these relationalities intra-actively co-produce a more-than↔human materiality to muscle which dynamically co-participates through/with/across the competitive practices that male bodybuilders pursue in building and, simultaneously, gendering their muscle.

5.1. Mind over muscle or muscle over mind? Building (a) musclemind in “the zone”.

As much as the bodybuilders participating in this study led lives largely orientated around the competitive development of their bodies and muscle; they were equally preoccupied with the preparation of their mental state for competition. In men’s competitive bodybuilding there is a belief that “[w]inning comes from the mind far more than it comes from the body” (Turrell, no date, as cited in Kennedy, 2008). In this regard, even Schwarzenegger (1998) has said: “The body will never fully respond to workouts until you understand how to train the mind as well” (p. 229). In restating the importance of the mind, in both training and competition, the subcultural lore of bodybuilding holds that competitive success can only be guaranteed when a bodybuilder masters, in Van Gaalen’s (2015) words, “mind over matter” (p. 23).

To this effect, it is unsurprising that academic analyses of competitive bodybuilding have also found that the subculture “re-enacts the historical dualism between mind and body” (Bunsell, 2013, p. 121). Nowhere is this more apparent than in men’s bodybuilding where an “age-old association between ... the male and the cerebral” (Moore, 1997, p. 3) is discursively reiterated within subcultural lore. For Bordo (1997), the subculturally constructed power of the mind over the matter of the body for male bodybuilders is consonant with the very same patriarchal and Cartesian tropes that encourage Western men to experience a detached sense of dominance to their bodily materiality. Indeed, Richardson (2008) has observed that the primary task of the competitive male bodybuilder is to master their unique regime of competitive practices to physically and subculturally transform/mogrify their body from “an unruly body, in thrall to nature” (p. 294) to a “supremely cultured body, utterly under the discipline of the mind” (p. 294).

In this regard, it was not unusual to find that the competitive male bodybuilders participating in this study typically reiterated a clear and hierarchical boundary between their mind and their body, as part of which their muscle was often nothing more than a passive

object to be (re)fashioned and (re)moulded under the control of the mind, or at least mentalised faculties, such as, their competitive goals, aspirations, and ambitions:

When people think of competitive bodybuilding they like to concentrate on the body aspect of it. They forget that there is a second aspect, the building part. Now the ability to build the body can only come from one place: the mind. This is, I would say, a lot more important. (Ron).

In the Cartesian reconstruction that Ron discursively inscribes between the matter/material/materiality of the bodybuilder's body and their mind, it is evident that Ron conceives of bodybuilder's mind as the primary site of importance in competitive bodybuilding because it, at least for Ron, remains the principal source of agency and activity in accumulating and applying subcultural knowledge on muscle-building practices. The portrayal of the male bodybuilder's body as a malleable object underpins the neoliberal and postmodern dimensions of a subcultural discourse which frames bodybuilding as "the ultimate form of self-creation" (Heywood, 1997, p. 167).

According to Day (1990), competitive bodybuilders' view their bodies akin to the way a "craftsman would look upon a piece of work" (p. 52): as an object. For bodybuilders' to therefore experience "alienation and estrangement" (Bunsell, 2013, p. 121) towards their bodies is not unimaginable. For example, in Fussell's (1991) description of his transition into competitive bodybuilding, he increasingly regarded his own body as "a shell to be polished and plucked" (p. 84). Yet, in an interesting contrast to these views, Reg provided a somewhat different understanding of the mind-body relationship in bodybuilding:

Well I hear a lot of guys bang on about mind over matter. But it's not like you just forget about your body. You can't have one without the other. A great bodybuilder brings his mind and body to the stage.

Interestingly, Reg's assertion that a bodybuilder cannot "have one without the other" offers a much more inter-connected and embodied sense of the relationship between a

bodybuilder's mind and their body. Yet, while this differs from the more prominent mind-body discourse of hierarchical division and detachment; what remains implicitly uncontested in Reg's comments is the continued bifurcation of "the mind" and "the body" as two separate facets of being, in his words, "a great bodybuilder". It was, in this regard, that Frank's (See Figure A) articulation of a far more radically relational way of both conceptualising and experiencing the mind-body relationship grabbed my attention when he and I discussed his autophotograph of "the zone":

→**Insert Figure A Here**←

In this photo I'm on a set of cable crossovers. Now usually on crossovers you feel a bit of start-stop that interrupts the motion in the exercise; especially when you bring your arms up there can sometimes be a jerk if the weight is too heavy or your form is off, but, anyway, the point is that I wanted to show you what it was like to be in the zone when training. You can see it here [[Pointing at Figure A]], there is great intensity and focus ... every bodybuilder aims to be in [the zone] when they train.

What Frank describes here as "the zone" is an experience described by many sportspeople when immersed in the intense focus and rigours of competitive training¹⁴⁹ (Dillon & Tait, 2000). While existing literature on "the zone" has found it to be an experiential state where a competitive sportsperson achieves their greatest sense of peak performance (Clark, Tofler, & Larden, 2005); in the world of competitive bodybuilding, "the zone" has been described as the "place where every athlete is able to deliver their best performance" (Van Gaalen, 2015, p. 22), especially in terms of weight training.

The "great intensity" Frank describes as consonant with his immersion in "the zone" bore a distinct contrast in our photo-encounter session from the somewhat monotonous reinscriptions of a typically Cartesianesque mind-body relationship. In my photo-encounter

¹⁴⁹ It is a turn of phrase which has also served as a proxy for the sense of "ecstasy, transcendent or altered states of consciousness" when competing (Young & Pain, 1999, p. 22).

with Frank, his experience of “the zone” ruptured the spectre of a Cartesian competitive male bodybuilder:

- Jarred: So what does it feel like being in the zone? The expression on your face looks so tense.
- Frank: It’s just feels really good. Like take these crossovers [[Gestures back to Figure A]] as an example. Like I said to you before there is that start-stop jerk to crossovers. Often making you very susceptible to shoulder injuries. It also breaks concentration. But when you’re in the zone, like I am here, there is just a great motion to the exercise, a real good flow. The arms and cables here move without any problems; there is a nice sweep up and strong pull down.

How Frank experiences being in “the zone” is comparable to the way Van Gaalen (2015) describes the bodybuilder’s experience of “the zone” as a state of mastery entailing a heightened sense of: (1) focus (the degree of complete attention given to the execution of a task); and (2) flow (the degree of complete engrossment in the execution of the task). Yet, for Van Gaalen (2015), both focus and flow are constructed as predominantly mental(ised) states “linked to the idea of concentration” (p. 22). This, however, is sharply contrasted by Frank who experiences “the zone” as an intensely embodied state of, in his words, “real good flow” – which is imbued with material (“great motion”) and affective (“feels really good”) dimensions.

In considering the material↔affective dimensions of Frank’s experience of “the zone”, it becomes possible to analytically engage “the zone” as an opportunity to “disrupt habitual and entrenched ways of thinking” (Hickey-Moody & Malins, 2007, p. 9) which reinstall tropes of disconnection that reassert the agency of the mind over the seemingly inert materiality of the body and muscle in men’s competitive bodybuilding. In this regard, the material↔affective flows that characterise Frank’s experience of “the zone” come to be marked by the feeling of an increasingly “effortless physical state” (Heywood, 2012, p. 134) which materially (e)merges through/with/across his arms and the material force and agency

of the crossover machine. In this sense, for Frank, “the zone” becomes a materially enfolded and enfolding “literal “contact zone” between human corporeality and [the] more-than-human” (Alaimo, 2008, p. 238, quotations original) world; through/with/across which his embodied and sensual experience of building muscle is performatively co-produced as an ever-more affectively inter-connected and corporealised body↔mind↔machine.

In his book, *Sensing Corporeally*, Floyd Merrell (2003) uses the term “bodymind” (p. 16) to problematise the Cartesian separation of mind and body and, with this, the conceptual rewriting of human subjectivity as disembodied. For Merrell (2003), human subjectivity is an “orchestrated whole” (p. 8). Interestingly, the concept of bodymind has been taken up within new material and feminist-inflected posthumanist work (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Lenz Taguchi, 2011, 2012); especially with the aim of theoretically rearticulating the mind “as fully incorporated - hence embodied - and the human being understood as an indissoluble unit of mind and body” (Strand, 2012, p. 29).

In the same vein, Frank’s experience of be(com)ing in “the zone”, means that it is not so much his mind that enters and experiences “the zone”, but, rather, his “bodymind faculties that register the flows of smell and the intensities of touch, level, temperature, pressure, tension and force” (Lenz Taguchi, 2012, p. 272) of the material relations through/with/across the cables of the crossover machine. In other words, every “nice sweep up and strong pull down” that Frank performs and feels materially co-produces a deeply attuned bodymind, or, perhaps more appropriately, a musclemind, through/with/across “the zone”. In this instance, any attempt to render the male bodybuilder’s presence in “the zone” as somehow ontologically distinct from the material↔affective flows and forces of “the zone” are in fact undone. Frank’s corpo-material experience of “the zone” reveals a sense of trans-corporealised embodiment which is co-constituted through/with/across “the zone”: Frank’s being *in* “the zone” is not so much a being *in* “the zone” as it is a be(com)ing *of* “the zone”

and “the zone” be(com)ing *of* Frank. In the throws and flows of the affectively charged trans-corporeal relations of “the zone” the motoric “start-stops” and bodily “jerks” which Frank describes as characterising less-than-optimal embodied modes of building muscle and training with weights dissolve away. To this effect, “the zone” itself becomes a competitively creative trans-corporeal spacetime/timespace through/with/across which new competitive possibilities and materialities of muscle are co-produced (and achieved) more effectively and efficiently, or, as Frank said in gesturing back towards his autophotograph (See Figure A):

... there’s really nothing that can stand in your way here. You can lift anything, squat anything. Anything is possible.

According to Kirby (2008) the belief in separating “creative invention ... from the body of the material world, indeed, from the material body” (p. 220) is core to conceptually formulating the Hu/Man(ist) subject of Western culture. Interestingly, this belief is equally evident in subcultural discourses of bodybuilding which underscore the creative act(ivity) of materialising muscle as a triumph of the bodybuilders’ will, fortitude, and perseverance, which are largely localised within their mind. Yet, for Frank, it is evident that the crafting of a muscular physique worthy of competition is not necessarily an “ability” that he masters (through the application of his mind or some other mental(ised) skill), but, rather, an activity which becomes intra-actively co-created through/with/across the trans-corporeal relations of “the zone”.

5.2. Rendering material↔discursive and more-than↔human skin: The competitive (re)making of skin.

Human skin occupies a particularly special anthropocentric place in Western culture (Ahmed & Stacey, 2012). According to Shildrick (2012), the surface of human skin has long been seen as the principal “protective envelope that defines and unifies our [corporeal] limits” (p.

171) as human. Indeed, as the “most visible boundary” (Shildrick, 2012, p. 161) of the human body, skin provides the most tangible reminder of our material insulation from the forces of the more-than-human world (Haraway, 1991; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Yet, for competitive bodybuilders, skin not only encapsulates their bodies of built muscle, but, more significantly, functions as *the* surface over which the adjudicative gaze and aesthetic eye of the bodybuilding judge traverses and inspects for muscular perfection and flaws. It is because the skin is ultimately an “instrument of masquerade” (Lovell, 2000, p. 15) for male bodybuilders, that they must fastidiously prepare it, through the rigorous application of moisturisers, oils, and tanning lotions, for the competitive stage.

According to Dutton (1995), the skin of the competitive bodybuilder should not be considered “natural” in its self-evidence “but rather a skin-surface which has been subjected to processes designed to enhance the message of muscular development” (p. 312). Indeed, one of the most important aesthetic criteria for a competitive bodybuilder’s skin is the extent to which it permits the visible display of the subcutaneous latticework of veins criss-crossing their bodies in what is typically referred to as vascularity (Johnston, 1996). Such vascularity aesthetically enhances the appearance of hardness and definition to muscular development (Roundtree, 2005). The competitive bodybuilder must therefore endeavour to competitively trans-from/mogrify their skin from an opaque blanket lined with adipose tissue to a diaphanous paper-thin skin through an extreme reduction in levels of subcutaneous bodyfat and water; as Maurice showed me an autophotograph of his vascularity (See Figure B):

→Insert Figure B Here←

I took this photo to show to you what vascularity is. ... [I]ts that look where your skin is hugging your muscle so tightly because you’ve managed to get every molecule of [body]fat out from underneath your skin. If I do a bicep flex when I am dehydrated like that it’s actually a great feeling of tight skin ... your skin is thin as paper, but it gives your muscle a look of awesome hardness.

According to Johnston (1996), bodybuilding practices of competitively rendering skin to the point where vascularity is visibly enhanced transgressively disrupts the physical appearance of the human body because the competitive bodybuilder's "*insides* appear to be coming *out*" (p. 337, emphasis original). It is, in the regard, that the materiality of Maurice's vascularised and paper-thin skin are made ripe for creatively reconfiguring what has often been considered the "inherent nature of bodily boundaries – especially human ones" (Barad, 2007, p. 155). With the sustained removal of subcutaneous bodyfat and water, Maurice's skin becomes akin to a film of porous cellophane wrapped so tightly around his body that, should he flex his bicep, the contractive bulge of his muscle would forcefully push against his skin, almost itching to burst out – producing a sensual embodied pleasure echoing Schwarzenegger's description of his skin when achieving the sought-after sensation of "the pump"¹⁵⁰. However, while Maurice may be competitively satisfied with the paper-like thinness of his skin; it also bedevils him:

The problem with having no subcutaneous [body]fat is that I really battle to control my body temperature. I think combined with the crazy-ass dieting and how your metabolism is already all over the place, I always feel cold and have to wear a couple layers of clothing or at least wear a thick woolly tracksuit. But I would wear a tracksuit anyway because I'm *min* for being stared at when I'm this shredded [[Points back at the Figure B]] before a competition.

Interestingly, from a trans-corporeal perspective, Maurice's remarks about his paper-thin skin provide a reminder that the so-called "outside world" is never "located somewhere out there, but is always as close as one's own skin" (Alaimo, 2009a, p. 11). In this sense, what Maurice experiences as the rapid loss of body heat through/with/across his paper-thin skin to the ambient environment highlights the way in which his skin becomes materially remade, through the competitive practices of what he refers to as "crazy ass dieting", from

¹⁵⁰ In *Pumping Iron* Schwarzenegger's description of the blood-engorged "pump" co-implicates the skin: "Your muscle gets a really tight feeling like your skin is going to explode any minute. ... It feels fantastic" (Butler et al., 1977).

that of a “boundary-object” (Ahmed & Stacey, 2012, p. 3) that hermetically seals him from the outside world, to one which renders him even more open and, in some instances, vulnerable, to the material forces and agencies of his more-than-human world(s). In this regard, the exposure of Maurice’s vascularised and vasodilated skin splays open his muscular body to other material and discursive forces of his more-than-human world, such as, the climatic forces of his physical environment as well as the perceptual forces of his highly vascular physique which constitute his social environment.

For Alaimo (2010b), the idea of vulnerability, which so often connotes an undesirable state of being human (especially for men), in fact underscores “a shared, trans-corporeal state that acknowledges the permeability of both people and places” (p. 28). For Maurice to be rendered vulnerable to both human and more-than-human forces disrupts “the fallacy of an impermeable skin” (Neimanis & Walker, 2014, p. 7) that has long served as the conceptual enclosure of Hu/Man(ist) subjectivity. No longer able to rely on his skin as a protective sheath, Maurice describes having to often wear a thick tracksuit as part of which the woollen lining materialises a kind of second (albeit synthetic) skin which protects his shredded and defined physique from both the loss of needed body warmth as well as what he experiences as the prejudicial gaze of a non-bodybuilding public.

Maurice’s feeling of being stared at in public is not unique to him. Bridges (2009) has found that male bodybuilders’ hyper-muscular bodies have little cultural value outside the gym and, in some instances, even elicit derision from non-bodybuilders. In this regard, it is not unusual for bodybuilders to often employ rhetorical strategies akin to developing a “thicker skin” which helps to displace their social awkwardness and defend against perceived prejudice (Probert, 2009). What Maurice’s remarks highlight are the ways in which his skin is not simply a “static substance” (Alaimo, 2010b, p. 32), but, rather, is trans-formed/mogrified through/with/across the bodybuilding practices which competitively prepare it for the stage

into a sensual site of multiple material↔discursive “interconnections, actions, and ... becomings” (Alaimo, 2010b, p. 32), some of which are not always desired nor completely controlled by the bodybuilder.

In a similarly significant way, is the role played by artificial bronzers, tanning lotions, and oils to create what competitive bodybuilders refer to as “competition colour”. Since the 1940s, tanning as well as the use of artificial skin dyes and bronzing creams have become a staple for competitive bodybuilders; in large part because of the way such darker hues of colour render more dramatic and vivid textures to the visual appearance and shape of muscular definition, especially for paler-skinned bodybuilders¹⁵¹ (Dutton, 1995).

For the paler-skinned bodybuilders, darkening the tone and colour of their skin typically begins with tanning long before the day of competition. Then, about two-to-three days prior to competition, a bodybuilder will then start to apply bronzer so that the artificial dye gradually absorbs into their skin, producing a darker hue. For the most part, however, bronzing happens backstage, on the day of competition, when tubes of bronzing cream are applied to a bodybuilder’s skin. Bronzing is, as Robbie explained to me when discussing an autophotograph of his competition colour (See Figure C), a complex and delicate affair:

→Insert Figure C Here←

It’s not like slapping on a coat of paint! When you apply bronzer it’s art and science. When [you] squeeze the tube [of bronzing cream] you must know what quantity to apply first and how to apply the cream evenly everywhere so that it doesn’t collect unevenly in places, picks up [the stage] light well, and just adds that extra-hard extra-defined quality like I’ve got here [[Gestures towards bronze-glazed legs in Figure C]]. Bronzer can get tricky. You need to make sure your skin is dry so there’s good absorption and not too much sweat that makes streaks in your tan because that would impact how the judges score you.

¹⁵¹ This marked a departure from the tradition of early (proto)bodybuilders, such as, Eugen Sandow, who covered themselves in white powder and chalk to resemble the Greco-Roman statues of alabaster and marble.

For Robbie, as a paler-skinned (White) bodybuilder, applying bronzer serves the purpose of ensuring that his hard-earned muscular development is visually enhanced under harsh stage lighting. However, as Robbie describes, there is a tactile sensitivity and artistic mastery that comes into play when applying bronzer. When Robbie applies bronzer, his hands and skin intra-act through/with/across the material agencies of the bronzing cream and his own muscular definition. Robbie must rub the globular consistency of the bronzing across his skin to avoid, in his words, it “collecting unevenly” and, with this, obscuring the appearance of his muscularity. Yet, at the same time, as Robbie’s hands mould the patina of bronzer across his skin, the material mounds, striations, and ripples which physically define his muscular development also come to strategically co-shape the movement of his hands and, in turn, co-participate in how the bronzer cream is spread across his physique.

As a competitive bodybuilder, Robbie is required to apply bronzer to his body in accordance with the aesthetic-adjudicative criteria which regulate the use and application of bronzing creams as well as the appearance of bodybuilders’ competition colour (BBSA, 2018a). In this effect, the practice of applying bronzer in competitive bodybuilding demonstrates how the bodybuilder’s skin is subculturally treated as a discursive object which is subjected to the competitive criteria that, for example, penalise male bodybuilders for presenting with an “[u]neven tan or no tan or streaking tan” (BBSA, 2018a, p. 53). This, however, does not mean the bodybuilder’s bronze-lacquered skin is just an inactive “surface of [subcultural] inscription” (Mansfield & McGinn, 1993, p. 67).

In this instance, the material organicities of Robbie’s skin become of vital importance in the material↔discursive rendering of an effective shade of competition colour. As Robbie highlights, the dryness and oiliness of his skin, the sweat pooling on it, and the chemical constituents of the bronzer, materially intra-act in ways which performatively rematerialise the consistencies of the bronzer, its rate of absorption into his skin, and his technique of

applying it – in effect rematerialising (the aesthetic qualities of) Robbie’s muscle and, in particular, the “extra-hard extra-defined quality” of muscle. In this regard, the bronzer itself becomes a lively “tricky” substance, whose material agencies are intra-actively re-constituted and co-composed through/with/across more-than↔human relations of its chemical resin with the sweat and oils secreted by Robbie’s skin and, at the same time, the aesthetic criteria regulating competitive male bodybuilders’ competition colour.

5.3. Food matters: Metabolic mangles and the competitive assemblage(s) of eating.

It could be said that the question of what came first, the chicken or the egg, does not matter to a competitive bodybuilder: what matters is their protein content. The high regard that competitive sportspeople have for protein is something which stretches back to the fifth century C.E. when the Grecian athlete Dromeus of Stymphalos won two Olympic marathons on an allegedly all-meat diet (Alvarez, 2008; Burke, 2007). In the world of men’s competitive bodybuilding, protein holds an almost cult-like status as bodybuilders “literally take the bull by the horns and wring him for every ounce of protein” (Roach, 2008, p. 419).

For the male bodybuilder, the consumption of protein is central to the competitive project of muscle accretion (Lambert et al., 2004); so much so that competitive bodybuilders adopt a particularly fastidious approach to planning and timing the amounts of protein and, in turn, carbohydrates, fats, and other nutrients, which ultimately come to make up each of their meals (Andersen et al., 1995; Vega & Jackson, 1996). For the most part, competitive bodybuilders plan their meals in ways which are competitively consonant with their phase and pattern of dieting, namely: (1) bulking, which focuses on muscle accretion with high volumes of protein intake and less inflexible restrictions on carbohydrate and fat intake; or (2) cutting, which focuses on maintaining the muscle mass accrued during bulking while eliminating bodyfat in the weeks and days leading up to a competition.

To this effect, food, generally, and protein, more specifically, is treated by the competitive bodybuilder as having a largely utilitarian value, that is, to serve the physiological functions of sustained muscle hypertrophy (Monaghan, 2001). In this regard, the practice of planning and scheduling meals, as well eating, becomes ever more regularised, routinised, and functionalised towards achieving competitive ends. This was especially evident when Kieran discussed an autophotograph (See Figure D) of his competitive meal planning and food preparation:

→Insert Figure D Here←

I took it [[Picks up Figure D from table]] about two weeks back when I moved into [the] cutting [phase]. Basically, I'm working on maintaining my protein intake while tapering off fats and carbs. Like each meal is high in protein. Each cup of those green beans [[Pointing at the contents of the plastic containers in Figure D]] will give me [at] least 2 grams of protein. I also have asparagus, broccoli, and chicken breast there [[Pointing back to the contents of the plastic containers in Figure D]]. It's the perfect meal plan for my metabolism. My own personal protein machine. Every meal has all the essential building blocks my body will use to maintain my muscle mass

Like most competitive bodybuilders, Kieran prepares his meals in advance to ensure that he is able to maintain “a regular high protein intake throughout the day in order to create the optimum conditions for muscle growth” (Bunsell, 2013, p. 69). For Kieran, his meals represent a dietary cornucopia of protein-rich foods which he alludes are physiologically ideal for providing the vast amount of amino-acids needed to stimulate and sustain competitive levels of muscle growth. To this effect, Kieran pointedly asserts how the foreign bodies of food which lay languidly in his plethora of plastic containers become, in his words, his “own personal protein machine” whose purpose it is to provide “all the essential building blocks” for his own muscle tissue. In this regard, it is apt to consider Alaimo's work on trans-corporeality and, in particular, how eating itself underscores the vital trans-corporeal relations that humans have with food.

For Alaimo (2010b), eating provides a posthumanist entry point into the materiality of human subjectivity because it emphasises how human bodies “are not in fact “human” in some transcendent, contained sense, but are flesh, substance, matter; ... [because they] require the continual input of other forms of matter – air, water, [and] food” (Alaimo, 2010b, p. 24, quotations original). However, while there may appear to be, on the surface of Kieran’s autophotograph (See Figure D) and his remarks, an analytical point of entry for further exploring the trans-corporeal relations between the materialities of his muscle and his meals; it is important to also recognise the humanocentric discourse which subtly underpins the way Kieran rhetorically constructs the relationship his body has with food, as a competitive bodybuilder. In this regard, Kieran describes that his meal planning facilitates the provision of high-protein foods which his body will, in his words, “use”, for maintaining his muscle mass while in the cutting phase of his competitive diet.

Thus, what Kieran’s remarks point to, rather than a radically relational undoing of the bodybuilder’s human body, is what Alaimo (2008) describes as a “model of incorporation” (p. 254). For Alaimo (2008), humanocentric models of incorporation are circumscribed by a logic of trans-substantiation¹⁵², that is, a model in which “food disappears into the human body, which remains solidly bounded” (p. 254). To this effect, the conceptual and material “outline of the human” (Alaimo, 2008, p. 254) remain intact while the material agencies and force of food to trans-corporeally trans-fuse/form/mogrify the human body are rendered mute – allowing both the human subject and human body to be (re)cast at/as the centre of eating, specifically, and (local and global patterns of) consumption, more broadly.

To this effect, it is worth considering Jane Bennett’s (2010) assertion that, from a less human-centred perspective, the practices of eating are “an assemblage in which the I is not necessarily the most decisive operator” (p. 40). Interestingly, in a similar (albeit somewhat

¹⁵² The concept of trans-substantiation has its roots in Christian doctrine and traditions. For example, the wine and bread offered at communion represent in concept and substance the blood and body of Jesus Christ.

Cartesian) sentiment, Kennedy (2008) reminds competitive bodybuilders that their single-minded desire for building muscle may not always align with the physiological priorities of their body. Kennedy (2008) cautions that “[t]he body has its own agenda” (p. 187) when digesting and metabolising food and nutrients – in effect offsetting the self-centred omnipotence of the competitive bodybuilder’s dieting practices. It is however, for this reason, that competitive bodybuilders are encouraged to plan and schedule their meals in an effort to manipulate their metabolisms in a way which “artificially shift the odds in favour of greater muscle mass” (Kennedy, 2008, p. 187).

Historically, nutritional science and dietetics has treated metabolism like “a chemical factory for the conversion of substrates”¹⁵³ (Landecker, 2011, p. 167). This attitude is commensurate with “classic biochemical studies of metabolism [that] depicted food as fuel” (Landecker, 2010, p. 21) – a characterisation of metabolism and food that, at least at first, Kieran subscribed to in his remarks. However, as Kieran continued to discuss the autophotograph (See Figure D) of his meticulously planned and prepared meals; it became increasingly apparent that his metabolism was more than a mere biological container of chemical reactions:

Kieran: So close to comp[etition] means that I have to stick to a strict timetable for my meals. Eating about every two, three hours. This guarantees that I have constant flow of protein and my metabolism remains high.

Jarred: It sounds tough?

Kieran: It is. But it’s also good because it keeps me on track. Keeps me focussed on my goals. Like now, if I miss one of my meals [[Pointing back to the contents of the plastic containers in Figure D]] I can start feeling that anxiety. Almost like my body has started shrinking. Immediately [I] start doubting everything. I start to doubt myself and if I’m gonna have what it takes to be a serious contender at my next comp[etition].

¹⁵³ From within this medical(ised) model, metabolism is defined as “[t]he chemical processes that occur *within* a living organism in order to maintain life” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, no date, as cited in Landecker, 2011, p. 170, emphasis added).

From this photo-encounter exchange with Kieran and his autophotograph (See Figure D), an analytically expanded understanding of his metabolism is rendered. Kieran describes how his metabolism becomes trans-corporeally entangled through his competitive goals, the emotional rigours of dieting, and items of food which, together, competitively co-constitute the assemblage of his cutting phase diet. In doing so, Kieran's metabolism is reconfigured as a far more distributed material↔discursive↔affective "swarm of activity" (Bennett, 2010, p. 50); or, what Susan Hekman (2010) refers to as an ontologically entangled/ing "mangle"¹⁵⁴ (p. 23) of human and more-than-human agencies.

According to Hekman (2010), mangles are enfolded/ing co-productions of agency through/with/across which both the human and more-than-human "elements of the mangle are mangled; they are mixed up with each other into a combination in which the various elements lose their clear boundaries" (pp. 24-25). Mangles therefore map out more complex and dynamic pictures "of how we are located in the world and how the elements of that world interact" (Hekman, 2010, p. 25). In doing so, however, the most important part of analysing mangles is not simply to explore "what they *are* but [to examine] what they *do*" (Jackson, 2009, p. 746, emphasis original). Thus, by analytically mangling Kieran's metabolism it becomes possible to not only render a more competitively complex consideration of the multiple material agencies which co-constitute his metabolism, but, also, understand the ways in which the trans-corporeal relations of a more-than↔human metabolism performatively stabilise and destabilise the competitively oriented assemblages of his eating.

Take, for example, the anxiety that Kieran experiences when his dietary plan is disturbed or disrupted. The reality is that nutrition is so central to the bodybuilder's competitive endeavours that, according to Giraldi (2009), the bodybuilder "spends half his

¹⁵⁴ Hekman (2010) adopts the mangle from science studies scholar and actor-network theorist Andrew Pickering (1993, 1995). It is a conceptual device which has also proven empirically popular with other new material and posthumanist feminists (See Jackson and Mazzei, 2012).

time thinking about ... iron, and the other half thinking about food” (p. 93). In this regard, Andersen et al. (1995) has found that competitive bodybuilders have a significant preoccupation with food; while Probert et al. (2007a) has found that frustration and guilt are experienced by bodybuilders when they deviate from their dietary plans. Following these studies, it would not seem unusual for Kieran to feel compelled to eat every two-to-three hours and for disruptions in his meal plan to result in him experiencing anxiety.

Kieran, however, articulates his experience of anxiety through/with/across the (real and imagined) affective forces of his food. In this way, Kieran’s experience of feeling like his muscled body begins to atrophy and shrink when missing scheduled meals, points to Bennett’s (2010) assertion that there is a “productive power intrinsic to foodstuff, which enables edible matter to coarsen or refine the imagination” (p. 49). In doing so, the affective force of Kieran’s nutritionally quantified and carefully timed meals become materially entangled in the sense of competitive subjectivity and success that he discursively constructs as a “serious contender” on the competitive stage. Thus, in this instance, a far richer and more relational rendering of Kieran’s subjectivity as a competitive bodybuilder is produced when analytically considered through/with/across the mangled/ing material↔discursive↔affective forces of a metabolism “not contained by a human frame” (Alaimo, 2010b, p. 21).

How a competitive male bodybuilder comes to understand his own unique metabolism and, in turn, how he plans and prepares a programme of meals and nutritional supplementation uniquely suited to best stimulate an anabolic state of muscular development is often considered one of the most important skills necessary in achieving not only competitive success, but, also, competitive longevity in bodybuilding (Kennedy, 2008). Nowhere is this more apparent than in times when a bodybuilder’s dieting goes awry and the urgent need for nutritional damage control becomes a competitive necessity. This was

especially evident when Tebogo and I discussed his distress about his metabolism entering what he called “meltdown mode”:

Tebogo: ... [M]y metabolism went into meltdown mode. At this point, I am nowhere near contest ready.

Jarred: What happened?

Tebogo: Well it started when I began cutting. I had to start earlier than normal because of some increased [body]fat I picked up from my off-season. The problem was that I decided to cut out all carbs and fats and also non-lean proteins. But that totally fucked-up my metabolism. Obviously, I cut out too much out and my metabolism just took a dive. It was a real fuckin rookie mistake. Even last week, when I did my measurements, it looks like my [body]fat levels are still the same but I’m actually losing muscle mass. I mean this is the kind of mistake that can break an athlete’s reputation.

Reading Tebogo’s metabolic meltdown through the trans-corporeal relations that co-produce the assemblage of his eating practices demonstrates how both human and more-than-human agencies actively co-participate in materialising a metabolism which, in his words, “just took a dive”. What Tebogo discovered was that by not introducing any quantity of carbohydrates into his diet while, at the same time, still maintaining a strenuous workout schedule, co-produced a metabolism of catabolic muscle breakdown (Severiche, 2013). With the removal of all carbohydrates, fats, and non-lean proteins from his diet, a new metabolic mangle (e)merged through/with/cross the assemblage of his competitive cutting which began to catabolically cannibalise his muscle tissue.

Interestingly, what Tebogo’s loss of muscle mass points to is the fine-line that bodybuilders must tread when engaged in competitive dieting, especially during their cutting phase. In essence, the competitive bodybuilder’s competitive dieting must entail the careful “dovetailing of two regimens: muscle gain and fat reduction” (Bolin, 1997, p. 184). The ability of a bodybuilder to do this successfully is however regarded as a subcultural signifier of bodybuilding expertise typically garnered through “years of [competitive] experience and

experimentation” (Schwarzenegger & Dobbins, 1984, p. 226). It is, to this effect, that Tebogo’s dietary decisions and, with them, the consequent loss of muscle mass during a phase of dieting when he should be reducing bodyfat comes to mark not only a competitively counterproductive move, but, at the same time, an error which brings into question his competitive judgement.

In this regard, Tebogo specifically characterises his dietary dilemma in a way which interpolates the material loss of inches to his muscle mass with the relatively pejorative discursive status of being “a real fuckin rookie”. Being designated a rookie in competitive bodybuilding, much like in other communities of competitive sport (Bryshun, 1997), typically connotes a subcultural status of immaturity, inexperience, and naïveté incompatible with that of professional and successful bodybuilding practice. What this then helps to highlight is what Hekman (2014) contends is the “complicated intra-action of the material, the discursive, and a host of other elements” (p. 182) which ultimately come to constitute “the subject *as* mangle” (p. 182, emphasis added). It is, in this way, that it becomes possible to see how Tebogo’s competitive subjectivity and, simultaneously, the materiality of his muscle mass, become intra-actively co-constituted through/with/across the material↔discursive mangle of his metabolic meltdown by not only jeopardising his chances of success at an upcoming competition, but, also, threatening his competitive reputation.

As Tebogo and I discussed this further in our photo-encounter session, his attention was turned by an autophotograph (See Figure E) of some nutritional supplements which his coach had now enlisted to remedy Tebogo’s metabolic mess and restore his competitive identity:

→Insert Figure E Here←

Tebogo: My coach has put me on these supplements [[Gestures towards Figure E]] to boost my metabolism. This is Metabolic Maximiser¹⁵⁵ [[Picks up Figure E]]. It's got loads of caffeine in [it] and the reviews [of the product] I've seen on some of the [online] forums are pretty good. I'm hoping this will get my metabolism back on its feet.

Jarred: Is it helping at all? I mean have you started seeing any results yet?

Tebogo: I think so. I feel like it is. But at this point I am willing to try anything. Luckily my coach has got a lot of experience with nutrition. I mean he's been competing for like 30 years now, so I really depend on him for this kind of guidance.

Tebogo's experience of having to utilise nutritional supplements to enhance his metabolism is not unusual for competitive bodybuilders (Brill & Keane, 1994; Grunewald & Bailey, 1993; Slater & Phillips, 2011). According to Roach (2008), nutritional supplements and dietary products first appeared on the North American competitive bodybuilding scene in the early 1950s. For the most part, the early patterns and techniques of nutritional supplementation by bodybuilders were predicated on the belief that consuming more protein would yield more muscle (Roach, 2008, 2011). Today, however, nutritional supplementation is considered a highly individual and complex component of competitive dietary practice (Brill & Keane, 1994; Maestu, Eliakim, Jurimae, Valter, & Jurimae, 2010; Monaghan, 2001).

In terms of nutritional supplementation, it is largely accepted within the competitive community that a bodybuilder will have to, as Schwarzenegger and Dobbins (1984) advise in *Arnold's Bodybuilding for Men*: "decide what works best for you" (p. 226). While the tailoring of a specific regime of nutritional supplements to a specific bodybuilder fits well within the highly individualistic ethos of competitive bodybuilding practice (Klein, 1986); this subcultural narrative conceals the expansive range of more-than↔human agencies which Tebogo alludes to intra-actively (in)forming the decision to, in his case, use Metabolic

¹⁵⁵ This is a pseudonym. Legal permission to use the name of the product Tebogo specifically mentions here was not granted by the company that produces the product.

Maximiser. In this instance, the nutritional knowledge proffered by Tebogo's coach; the subcultural credence of online reviews of Metabolic Maximiser Tebogo; Tebogo's perceptual and embodied sense of an improving metabolism; Tebogo's desire to urgently reverse the effects of his metabolic meltdown; and the high quantities of caffeine found in Metabolic Maximiser, all come to trans-corporeally transfuse Tebogo's competitive bodymind and, through/with/across the competitively oriented assemblage of his nutritional supplementation with Metabolic Maximiser highlight the ways in which "the material and the discursive merge in the subject" (Hekman, 2014, p. 178) through/with/across multiple sources of influence and power deemed subculturally acceptable within the competitive community, such as, Tebogo's own embodied perceptions and sensations, internet-based bodybuilding forums, and his more seasoned bodybuilding coach.

Thus, rather a humanocentric reassertion of the supremacy of the self-contained individuated bodybuilder as the sole self-determining agent in their dietary and nutritional decision-making; Tebogo's autophotograph (See Figure E) and explanation about his metabolic meltdown, highlights how the practice of dietary decision-making is itself trans-corporeally in/trans/re-formed through/with/across the human and more-than-human agencies which, at multiple (personal, inter-personal, and subcultural) scales, come to "exercise formative power" (Bennett, 2010, p. 49) over one another, together.

5.4. Chemically competitive flesh: The viscous porosity of muscle and the thing-power of a syringe.

The contemporary reality of men's competitive bodybuilding is that any bodybuilder who wishes to achieve a sustained level of competitive success ultimately faces the choice of whether or not to use steroids – because it is quite likely that most of his fellow competitors already are (Hotten, 2004). The muscles of modern-day male bodybuilders are more massive

and more defined than ever before (Dutton, 1995); and in the quest to compete against such physiques many male bodybuilders have had to make the choice to “dig deeper into their pharmaceutical grab-bag” (Hatfield, no date, as cited in Fussell, 1991).

According to Duchaine (1989), AASs and PPEs function to “increase muscle mass and strength past what they would naturally be as limited by the body’s own secretions”¹⁵⁶ (p. 10). It is through the strategically combined and competitively planned use of AASs and PPEs, in concert with sustained dieting and perseverate weight training, that male bodybuilders obtain the competition-ready “peaked physique” of enhanced muscle mass and density coupled with ultra-fine muscular definition and visible vascularity which form the necessary aesthetic dimensions for competitive success in men’s bodybuilding (Kennedy, 2008). To this effect, the competitive bodybuilder’s peaked physique is not, at least in the strictest sense, a completely “natural” body, but, more accurately, a body of muscle which becomes materially achievable (if only temporarily) through the competitive practices and technologies of what Monaghan (2001) aptly calls “chemical bodybuilding” (p. 14) – making the body of the modern-day male bodybuilder less human and more “pharmacological Other” (Garratt, 2014). In a similar way, Xander pointed this out to me when he and I came across an autophotograph (See Figure F) of his steroid-enhanced physique:

→**Insert Figure F Here**←

I’ve never understood why some guys shy away from talking about steroids. Do I use steroids? Yes. But it’s not because I want to. It’s because I need to if I want to stand a chance of winning. ... I would love to tell you that this [[Gestures towards his body in the Figure F]] is all natural, but it’s not all me.

In discussing the motivation behind his competitive use of steroids, Xander makes reference to what Dutton (1995) has alluded to is the “open secret ... of competitive

¹⁵⁶ This occurs by means of vast complex of neuro-chemical and hormonal mechanisms whose intricacies are beyond the space limitations of this thesis. For further reading I recommend engaging both academic literature (See Smith and Perry, 1992a, 1992b; Celotti and Negri-Cessi, 1992; and Kicman, 2008) as well as literature popular in the men’s bodybuilding community (See Thorne, 2009).

bodybuilding. Open, because everyone who moves in this world is aware that practically all top competitors ... have been steroid-users; [and] a secret, because almost all have publicly denied the fact” (p. 280). For Xander, steroid use is a competitive necessity. Interestingly, in this regard, Xander describes the production of his competitive physique as “not all me” and, in so doing, underscores the trans-corporeal relations of reliance he has on the chemical co-participation of the steroids which form a vital part of his competitive muscle-building practices.

In further discussing Xander’s chemical collaboration with steroids, he went on to emphasise how steroids helped to materially render a competition-worthy physique:

Well if you look at my physique [[Gestures back towards his body in the Figure F]]. It’s obvious that this kind of definition and density in the muscle tissue is only possible with steroids. Getting my bodyfat down to 4% so you can clearly the lines and details in the muscle fibres is only possible with steroids.

In Xander’s remarks, he draws direct attention to the materiality of his muscle tissue and, in particular, how crafting the levels of muscular “definition and density” as well as reducing the levels of bodyfat needed for competition is, in his words, “only possible with steroids”. By highlighting the material qualities of his muscle tissue, Xander’s chemically enhanced physique (See Figure F) helps to illustrate what Nancy Tuana (2008) has called the “viscous porosity” (p. 200) of human flesh.

For Tuana (2008), viscous porosity underscores how “[t]he dance of agency between human and nonhuman agents ... happens at a more intimate level” (p. 198). According to Tuana (2008), the “boundaries between our flesh and the flesh of the world we are of and in is porous” (p. 198); and it is this porousness which materially embeds and immerses human bodies in an always ongoing “exchange of molecules” (Tuana, 2008, p. 200) through/with/across the more-than-human world. In examining the viscous porosity of Xander’s flesh, it becomes possible to see how his muscle tissue is trans-corporeally (re)made

through/with/across a concoction of chemical xenobiotics which come to percolate the amino soup of his muscle tissue and cells. In other words, it is through/with/across the more-than↔human relations of his steroid use that his muscle becomes materially transformed/mogrified into chemically fortified flesh, that is to say, chemical flesh.

Xander's remarks about his chemically infused flesh tellingly reveal how the bodies of competitive male bodybuilders do not remain torpidly inert to their chemical relations through/with/across steroids, but, rather, become "volatile, emergent, and continually evolving ... [especially] as they encounter different sorts of chemicals" (Alaimo, 2008, p. 262). Nowhere was this clearer than in Kevin's autophotograph (See Figure G) of his syringe and the pustulated infection which it had helped to co-produce:

→**Insert Figure G Here**←

I'm telling you that bodybuilding involves all sorts of pain. Especially the injections. I've always hated injectables [[Points to Figure G]]. The pain when those little fuckers bite into you is something I never get used to. But this is all part of bodybuilding, you know? If there's no pain then there's no gain.

While existing research literature has already brought to light the rhetorical manoeuvres that competitive bodybuilders often engage in to justify and rationalise their use of steroids (Boardley & Grix, 2014; Keane, 2009; Monaghan et al., 2000); the social pejoratives surrounding bodybuilders' steroid use is particularly heightened when injectable steroids, that is, those steroids administered by means of a syringe, come into discussion (Monaghan, 2001).

Syringes, more so than many other non-human objects, can invoke significant physical and psychological trepidation in the human imagination (Andrews, 2011). Coming into contact with a syringe, if not the very sight of it, can summon forth personal and social histories of cringe-worthy pain (Hardesty, 1996). In the subculture of competitive bodybuilding, syringes possess both a complex and, at times, disreputable status which has

long been an effect of the involvement of syringes in illicit intravenous drug use (Duchaine, 1989). Where the syringe's hypodermic needle was first developed for medical and surgical work (Kravetz, 2005); it was the adoption of the syringe by intravenous drug users that has proven a hard-to-shake stigma (Davenport-Hines, 2003).

For Kevin, his use of syringes to administer "injectables", that is, injection-based steroids, becomes rhetorically intertwined (and justified) through/with/across subculturally inflected discourses which valorise the experience of pain in bodybuilding (Bunsell, 2013) and, in particular, what Ian (2001) describes as the "familiar byword of serious bodybuilders" (p. 96): "no pain, no gain". Interestingly, in the subculture of competitive bodybuilding, pain is largely corporealised within the confines of the bodybuilder's human body because, as Staszal (2009) explains: "pain is what indicates the body is responding" (p. 75) to the labour of building muscle. For Kevin, however, his autophotograph (See Figure G) brings to attention the more-than-human syringe co-implicated in producing the pain of his injections. Furthermore, Kevin's remarks highlight how the syringe involved in administering his injectables is, rather than an inactive object, materially↔discursively↔affectively transformed/mogrified into a "little fucker" that actively "bites" into his flesh through/with/across the more-than-human↔relations of his injecting practice.

In this regard, it is useful to consider Jane Bennett's (2004) concept of "thing-power" (p. 348). For Bennett (2004), thing-power provides a conceptual framework through which to understand those "force[s] exercised by that which is not specifically human (or even organic) upon humans" (p. 351); and, in this instance, further aids in exploring the trans-corporeal dimensions of the syringe's thing-power which are performatively co-produced through/with/across the intra-actions of Kevin's steroid injecting practices:

Jarred: Oh gosh. What's happening here?

Kevin: Well I've been using this *gear*, this one is um uh deca [durabolin], for a while. With deca you have to inject it in the glutes¹⁵⁷ but over the past two months I have been experiencing some problems with an infection [at the tissue site] where I inject. There's a bit of blood and pus [[Points to bloodied cotton wool in Figure G]], and also a little bruising, swelling [[Gestures towards his backside]]. I asked my [training] partner to check it out. It's not bad. It's not an abscess or anything like. It's just a training injury. Don't get the wrong idea here! This isn't what bodybuilding is all about hey. You just got to understand that this is the sacrifice we have to make. It's blood, sweat, and tears. And we do things professionally and it's very serious. We use the right *gear*, proper needles, sanitise properly, [and] learn the best techniques for injecting. I just fucked up a little. It was too much too soon.

In the ongoing photo-encounter with Kevin and his autophotograph (See Figure G), it becomes increasingly evident the thing-power of “little fucker” comes to extend far beyond the immediate corpo-material relations of injecting steroids. Rather, the thing-power of “little fucker” becomes co-produced through/with/across the more-than↔human relations of: Kevin's infected gluteal tissue; the bloodied cotton swab; Kevin's interpretation of steroid use in the competitive bodybuilding community; and his competitive ambitions.

From Kevin's remarks it is evident that, at least at first, the role played by “little fucker” in materially co-producing his buttock infection threatens to destabilise his competitive use of the steroid deca durabolin. Through/with/across the more-than↔human entanglement of our photo-encounter, the autophotograph of the syringe and the bloodied cotton wool as well as Kevin's infected buttock tissue appear to intra-actively co-produce the spectre of danger or social deviance in Kevin's use of the syringe. In this regard, as our photo-encounter continues, Kevin revises the discursive characterisation of his wound in such as a way so as to ensure that I am not given the “wrong idea” about competitive bodybuilders/ing. In doing so, Kevin's use of a syringe to inject deca durabolin now becomes a more legitimate practice which, in the service of competitive ends, demands to be taken, according to Kevin, “seriously”. To this effect, the syringe becomes part of a competitive

¹⁵⁷ See Appendix D.

endeavour which requires precise vile contents, an exact size and type of needle, as well as sanitisation and hygiene procedures.

In the competitively oriented configuration of Kevin's syringe use, the syringe requires Kevin to learn about how to master the thing-power of the syringe's prick through, in Kevin's words, "the best techniques for injecting", such as, for example, the angles that the syringe must enter the skin, the depth of its penetration, and what tissue sites it can make contact with. In this regard, Kevin's remarks reveal the syringe to actively co-participate in the trans-corporeal materialisation of his muscle and, at the same time, his identity as a "professional" competitive bodybuilder. In doing so, the material↔discursive professionalisation of Kevin's more-than↔human relations with the syringe go on to reaffirm subcultural lore which holds that competitive bodybuilders "don't just randomly pop pills and stick needles into their asses" (Kennedy, 2008, p. 666), but, rather, develop a "sophisticated ethnopharmacological knowledge" (Monaghan, 2001, p. 24) which organises their steroid use practices.

What is especially interesting about the photo-encounter with Kevin and his autophotograph (See Figure G), is the way it also draws attention to the dynamic intra-action of multiple material agencies at work in his injecting practices. In this regard, Kevin's remarks also highlight that his subjectivity as a competitive bodybuilder, and the material↔discursive status of his buttock wound, are intra-actively trans-formed/mogrified through/with/across both the real and metaphorical flows of his blood.

While blood has been, at least in Western culture, largely treated as a pre/extra-discursive abjection of/from the body (Springgay, 2009); the materiality/ies of blood can be "theorized in ways that neither presume a fixed, a priori ontological status or essence, nor exclude it from an active role in the production of realities" (Fraser & Valentine, 2006, p. 98). From the photo-encounter with Kevin and his autophotograph (See Figure G), it was evident

that the congealing of blood and pus performatively co-produced a wounded buttock with the material↔discursive status of what he initially describes as an “infection”. Interestingly, in this regard, the pustulated blood and infected buttock tissue also became entangled with subcultural discourses about abscesses.

According to Kennedy (2008) abscesses are “extremely painful, large areas of infected tissue” (p. 676). Within the competitive community of bodybuilders, abscesses are often regarded as scarlet letters which signify reckless and uninformed injecting practices (Beukes, 2015). Similarly, in the latter part of this photo-encounter with Kevin, the infected mass of swollen gluteal tissue, the pus-bloodied exudate seeping from his wound, and his own subculturally informed understanding of abscesses, intra-actively co-produce blood’s thing-power in ways which allow it to destabilise the professionalism of both his embodied subjectivity as a competitive bodybuilder and his injecting practices.

Kevin however discursively trans-forms/mogrifies his wounded buttock tissue, from a personally and professionally unpalatable “infection”, into a “training injury”. Through/with/across the material↔discursive↔affective relations of our photo-encounter, the material flow and clotting of Kevin’s blood, pictured in his autophotograph (See Figure G), became interpolated with the metaphorical flow of blood in the subculturally cliched discourse of “blood, sweat and tears”. In so doing, these material↔discursive↔affective agencies of our photo-encounter intra-actively co-produced the symbolic status of Kevin’s blood, as well as his wounded buttock tissue, as materialisations of what Joe Weider (1981) regarded as the “pain and sacrifice” (p. 2) that marks a bodybuilder’s total dedication to competitive bodybuilding.

5.5. The tools of the trade? Becoming-with a leg-press machine and a dumbbell bench-press.

For the most part, bodybuilders consider gym equipment, be it free-standing weights or weight training machines, as the fundamental “tools of the trade” (Hansen, 2005, p. 129) for muscular development. To this effect, gym equipment is often regarded as the inanimate implements, objects, and resources for the building and sculpting of muscle. Within the humanocentric discourse of competitive bodybuilding, the status and function of gym equipment becomes solely dependent on the competitive intentions, experience, and activity of the human bodybuilder. In this regard, all competitive bodybuilders face the developmental task of learning to use different pieces of gym equipment to initiate and sustain muscle growth, in particular through the development of personalised weight training programmes (Schwarzenegger & Dobbins, 1984).

While the functionalist attitude which objectifies and pacifies the material force and agency of gym equipment is evident in both guides to bodybuilding training (English, 2013) as well as auto-ethnographic scholarship by (former) bodybuilders (Fussell, 1991; Giraldi, 2009); it also mirrors the way many competitive sportspeople come to regard the non-human, inorganic, and technological matter/material/materiality of their sports or training equipment (Kerr, 2016). For Butryn and Masucci (2003), refuting the material agency or force of sports and training equipment reaffirms the unique sense of human exceptionalism which often underpins how sportspeople construct their athletic prowess and competitive success.

In contrast to this, when Jacob and I discussed the intense rigours of a “leg day”¹⁵⁸ as part of a photo-encounter with an autophotograph (See Figure H) of him performing leg-

¹⁵⁸ “Leg day” is a colloquial phrase in competitive bodybuilding which refers to a day in a bodybuilder’s training schedule on which the lower half of the body is trained. More often than not leg days entail the training of all the major muscle groups of the legs.

presses; it was evident that the leg-press machine was more than just “passive matter” (Alaimo, 2010a, p. 104):

→Insert Figure H Here←

Jacob: The thing about leg days is that you’ve got to give it everything to get results. You must have nothing left when you walk out of the gym.

Jarred: So that’s what you were doing in your photo?

Jacob: Yeah. I think that’s a total load of 320kg there [[Gestures towards Figure H]]. Which I usually plan to train from 80 to 100 reps. But when you get up to this weight leg-press becomes a different beast altogether. You’re facing the real possibility of injury here [[Gestures back towards Figure H]]. There’s no fucking around here. There needs to be a lot of concentration. A lot of focus. I mean a leg injury can be a real disaster. They’re difficult to recover from and can destroy a career.

According to Bridges (2009), leg days are the days on which the most “commonly despised muscle group” (p. 85) is trained in the gym. Indeed, as Jacob reiterates in our photo-encounter, leg days are synonymous with the kind of punishing workouts that characterise competitive bodybuilders’ weight training programmes (Fussell, 1991; Garratt, 2014). In this regard, leg days have come to occupy a special place in the subcultural lore of men’s bodybuilding because of what is widely accepted as the particularly heavy weight which typically needs to be placed on the leg musculature in order to develop competition-standard leg muscularity. It is, in this context, that the leg-press machine has become a useful piece of gym equipment for male bodybuilders in developing lower limb muscle¹⁵⁹ (Kennedy, 2008).

In displacing the conventional humanocentric bias which would typically designate the leg-press machine (and other such gym equipment) as an inanimate “resource for human

¹⁵⁹ Kennedy (2008) contends that if “squats are the No. 1 leg exercise then leg presses are a close second – and for many bodybuilders a safer way to train the legs” (p. 109). Although there are different variations of the leg-press machine and the technique of leg-pressing, the most common is the 45-degree leg-press. The aim of using this machine would be to place large amounts of weight on the thigh muscles while reducing some of the strain that is consequently exerted on the lower back and knees – something that can only be done with greater difficulty in squats. The leg-press machine requires the bodybuilder to physically place himself “inside” the machine by lying down on a padded back support and stationing their feet shoulder width apart against a push-platform which, at a 45-degree angle, is preloaded with the desired weight (See Figure H).

use” (Alaimo, 2010a, p. 2); Jacob’s autophotograph (See Figure H) points toward a leg-pressing experience in which both he and the leg-press machine are co-produced differently through/with/across their intra-activity. On the one hand, the heavily weighted leg-press machine intra-actively co-participates in co-shaping Jacob’s bodymind: Jacob becomes more intently focussed and attuned to lifting the 320kg stack of weights loaded on to the leg-press. On the other hand, and at the same time, the leg-press and its 320kg of weight are also co-produced differently through/with/across their corpo-material relations with Jacob: the leg-press becomes, in Jacob’s words, “a different beast altogether” – a beast capable of inducing a career destroying injury.

While Jacob acknowledges that the prospect of sustaining injury while leg-pressing would be disastrous to a bodybuilder’s competitive career; his remarks draw attention to the way both human subjectivity and agency can be “unsteadied by unruly nonhuman agencies” (Alaimo, 2016a, p. 133). Here, however, the material agency of the weighted leg-press machine is not something that the leg-press possesses innately; rather, the leg-press, in Jacob’s words, “becomes” a “different beast” – a becoming which is performatively co-constituted through/with/across the material↔discursive↔affective intra-action of: the overlapping force of personal and subcultural expectations which demand intense and unrelenting training of the lower-limb musculature on leg days; the growing fatigue of his leg muscles whilst leg-pressing; the 320kg of weight loaded on to the bars of the leg-press machine; and the prospect of incurring an injury. This sense of becoming is, to borrow from Donna Haraway (2008), a “becoming-with” (p. 38), that is, a kind of trans-corporeal co-becoming which ontologically knots both human and non-human agencies through/with/across their material relations with one another together.

In a similar photo-encounter with Pierre and an autophotograph (See Figure I) of his training partner, Gregg, aiding him with a set of dumbbell bench-presses; it was also evident

how Pierre's experience of bench-pressing became intra-actively enacted through/with/across the co-participation of multiple material agencies:

→Insert Figure I Here←

Pierre: [Gregg]'s¹⁶⁰ been a big part of my success. I pretty much know I can count on him for support.

Jarred: How's that? I mean, how's Gregg helped you?

Pierre: Well I can't train without him. I know I can plan to train till failure because he's there. He's the only person I will train with because of how long we've trained together. He's learnt to read my body better than anyone. Even here [[Picks-up Figure I]]. Gregg knew exactly when to come in. I don't need to tell him. He knows to let me push through as much as I can and only when failure sets in then he must come in. But even then, he doesn't just come in full blast. He knows to let me suffer and work harder. Even when my muscles have gone numb and I feel like giving-up. That's the perfect spotter. You don't want some dude who's going try rescue you from failure because it's only when you reach that failure that unused muscles actually start working. Gregg knows this. He understands that his job is just to steady me first with a little pressure under my arms then come in with a little more extra lift support to push me through failure.

In the book, *Beginning Bodybuilding: Real Muscle/Real Fast*, Little (2008) explains to new and prospective bodybuilders that a "spotter" is someone who "assists you in completing your repetitions" (p. 21). In many ways more than just that, Pierre's remarks draw attention to how both a (good) spotter and the practice of (good) spotting is integral to a bodybuilder's competitive weight training; not least because of the role the spotter plays in physically and psychologically supporting a bodybuilder to reach "failure" when training (Weider & Reynolds, 1984). According to Schwarzenegger and Dobbins (1998), failure describes a state of weight training where, as a result of "the gradual fatiguing of muscle fibres involved" (p. 137) in a particular exercise motion, it becomes increasingly difficult to execute the exercise. In this regard, failure is, in contrast to the usual connotations of the word, a much sought-after state of training where more and more muscle "fibres are

¹⁶⁰ A pseudonym.

recruited” (Schwarzenegger & Dobbins, 1998, p. 138) in order to execute the motion of an exercise and, in doing so, promoting the growth and development of those muscles.

For Pierre, Gregg’s spotting is itself a material↔discursive↔affective practice through/with/across which the steadying material force of his hands against Pierre’s arms; his discursively circumscribed understanding of the role and functions of a spotter and, in particular, the technique of spotting a bodybuilder; and the affective presence of his encouraging motivation, all come to co-produce Gregg as, in Pierre’s words, “the perfect spotter”. At the same time, Gregg’s spotting practice also becomes intra-actively transformed/mogrified through/with/across the more-than↔human relations of Pierre’s dumbbell bench-press. Gregg’s spotting becomes-with Pierre and the dumbbells as their corpo-materialities “*meet-talk*, move, negotiate, listen, feel, and think-with each other” (Hird, 2009, p. 338, emphasis original) through/with/across each repetition of the dumbbell bench-press. To this effect, each repetition of the dumbbell bench-press becomes more than just the programmatic execution of a certain number of sets and repetitions; rather, each repetition (re)produces, in always shifting and changing ways, “a multiplicity of encounters” (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 532) through/with/across which human and more-than-human agencies not only materially (re/de/trans-)form Pierre’s performance of the dumbbell bench-press, but, also, (re/de/trans-)form Pierre and Gregg’s “subjectivity and agency through [more-than-human] companions that merge to become new figures together” (McAlister, 2010, p. 131).

In this regard, Pierre’s plan to train his chest and arms “till failure” is not so much a predesigned state that Pierre cognitively conceives through his preplanned weight training programme; as if failure is a predetermined spatio-temporal and bounded state of muscular fatigue. Rather, it is through/with/across the “assemblage of overlapping and intra-acting forces” (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 532) which mark Pierre’s becoming-with the

dumbbell bench-press and Gregg's spotting that the failure of Pierre's arms and chest muscles become trans-corporeally articulated. To this effect, "a mixture of different bodies and matter" (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 532) come to co-participate in performatively producing Pierre's muscular failure, including: the biokinetic materialities of his arms and chest musculature; the material weight of the dumbbells in each of his hands; and the material presence of his spotter and training partner, Gregg.

In doing so, the very sensual experience of muscular failure also becomes unbounded from within Pierre's body and musculature. For Pierre, the sensuality of failure becomes co-produced through/with/across: the feeling of Gregg's hands increasingly stabilising his arms; the emerging sensation of numbness as his muscles yield to the weight of the dumbbells; and what he experiences as the insurmountable heft of the dumbbells as he strains to lift them on his own. Here, muscular failure becomes an intra-actively distributed more-than↔human process of becoming-with the material agencies of Pierre's muscle as well as those of the dumbbells and Gregg's spotting.

5.6. The matter of time: Building muscle maturity and muscle memory.

In the competitive world of bodybuilding time is of the essence. In many ways, a bodybuilder comes to be defined as competitive in large part because of their participation in bodybuilding competitions which require the time-consuming commitment to muscular development. To this effect, the competitive male bodybuilder's physique is developed and dieted on the basis of a competitive calendar of bodybuilding contests which organise their competitive preparations and practices. In preparing for competition, the life of the competitive bodybuilder becomes divided into a series of overlapping time periods, such as: the bulking and cutting phases of dieting (as in section 5.3.); the cycling periods of different steroid regimens (as in section 5.4.); and the countless hours devoted to training in the gym

(as in section 5.5.). In the run up to a competition, it is not unusual for a bodybuilder's competitive success to come down to the matter of both minutes and milligrams:

At the time of weigh-in I hadn't gotten enough fluid out of my system. When I did a preliminary weigh-in I was just over 100kgs and I needed to be under 100kgs so that I could compete in the Heavyweight division. Before the official weigh-in I used lasix, the diuretic, and went and sat in the sauna for an hour to help sweat out. That did the trick. About an hour and half later I managed to weigh-in at about 99.5[kgs]. (Jeff).

While Jeff's remarks highlight how participation in bodybuilding contests often entails muscular development (in kilograms, centimetres, and millimetres) with competitive preparation (in years, months, weeks, days, hours, and minutes); competitive bodybuilders typically perceive time as a backdrop against which they actively drive their muscular development:

I'm not too concerned about achieving too much right now. I've only been competing for 3 years and the guys I'm going up against have had years to work on their bodies and work on the physique they want. I know I'll get there in future. I just need a more time. (Kavir).

What Kavir's comments draw attention to is the way the construction of time as a backdrop to the building of muscle ultimately objectifies the bodybuilder's body, that is, as an object which requires sustained work (by the bodybuilder) over time which results in their body being progressively (re)built and (re)fashioned for (re)presentation on the competitive stage.

Understanding time as a linear and continuous backdrop to human civilisation, activity, and development has been a longstanding feature of humanocentric Western culture and science¹⁶¹ (Barad, 2007). To this effect, time has been persistently (re)cast within Western humanocentric thought as a sequential timeline composed of spatially distinct time-

¹⁶¹ For further detail see Grosz's (1995) critical examination of the way classical Euclidean geometry has come to underpin how Western culture and science attribute "certain spatial properties" (p. 97) to time, rendering it linear, sequential, and continuous.

zones (or temporal orders) representable as a progressive (although disconnected) movement from “the past” to “the present” and, ultimately, to “the future” (Grosz, 1995) – a hegemonic model of time which divests time of any material agency and liveliness as it is rendered nothing more than a background to human agency (Barad, 2007; Højgaard et al., 2012; Neimanis & Walker, 2013).

In contrast to this, Jonathan alluded to the intra-active force of time in materially building muscle, when discussing the subculturally peculiar idea of “muscle maturity”:

→Insert Figure J Here←

A lot of the guys coming up the ranks ask me how they can get a physique like mine. I tell them the same thing. You have to put the time into your physique. This is not an overnight thing. If you don’t slog it out in the gym developing great quality muscle then you aren’t going to win shows. I’ve been at it for 23 years, almost half my life, and this is what [[Pointing towards Figure J]] I have to show for it. It’s great muscle maturity and great conditioning. I’ve got really nice separation between my muscle groups and my physique is dense and hard.

According to Salmon (n.d.), competitive bodybuilding requires a bodybuilder to put their “muscles through years of intense training until they break down and mature to a level that will show increased definition and deep striations” (para. 2) – a belief also evident in Jonathan’s description of his own level of muscle maturity. Amongst competitive bodybuilders, muscle maturity refers to those prized aesthetic qualities of hardness, density, and definition which have been successfully engraved into their muscular physique over years of weight training. Although, at face value, the term “maturity” is somewhat misleading because it often connotes the chronological progression of time¹⁶²; for Jonathan, time and muscle do not remain ontologically distinct from one another in cultivating muscle maturity. Developing muscle maturity is, at least for Jonathan, not so much a process which occurs *in* time, but, rather, is made *of* time, or, as he states: “You have to put the time into your

¹⁶² For example, in the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, maturity is defined as “the state, fact or period of being mature” (Stevenson & Waite, 2011, p. 883).

physique”. In doing so, time no longer features as an externalised parameter to Jonathan’s competitive muscular development, but, rather, intra-actively comes to be both “co-present and co-producing” (Juelskjær, 2013, p. 760) of the materiality/ies of his musculature.

In addition to time, Jonathan’s remarks about muscle maturity also co-implicate particular spaces for the time(s) of muscular development, namely, the gym. According to Jonathan, a competitive bodybuilder must, in his words, “slog it out in the gym” – this is where the time of/for developing competitively advantageous muscle maturity is materially emplaced and valued. In doing so, Jonathan highlights how the material spatialities of the gym co-participate in making the kinds of (arduous and labour intensive) time(s) needed for “developing great quality muscle”. In this regard, Jonathan’s muscle maturity becomes not only a matter of time, but, moreover, of space and, in particular, the intra-active enfolding of the subculturally peculiar space(s) and time(s) of/for building muscle, or, what Barad (2007) describes as the “spacetime-mattering” (p. 234) of, in this instance, muscle.

Thus, in Jonathan’s description of muscle maturity, a far more relational and trans-corporeal sense of time, space, as well as matter are alluded to. In this regard, Jonathan’s sense of time underscores the way in which the matter/material/materiality of his body cannot be thought of as foreclosed to the material force of time. For Neimanis and Walker (2014), when time is retheorised through the lens of trans-corporeality, it is possible to reconceptualise time as a “thick time” (p. 4). Thick time materialises through/with/across the enfolding of the traditionally distinct and spatialised temporal orders of past, present, and future (represented causally as past→present→future) in a way which conceptually renders time a materially dense multi-temporal past↔present↔future.

In considering the material relations between Jonathan’s muscle and time through/with/across the analytical device of a trans-corporeal thick time, it is possible to see how Jonathan’s musculature is not rendered (more) mature because it inhabits a specific

temporal location defined by a particular level of definition and density that is different from a chronologically earlier and spatially disconnected temporal location defined by an earlier, less developed level of muscular definition and density¹⁶³. Rather, Jonathan's muscle maturity intra-actively (e)merges as his muscle is co-threaded through/with/across the time of building muscle and time co-threaded through/with/across his muscle-building practices in such a way that Jonathan's muscle becomes trans-corporeally thick/thicker/thickened. The temporal thickening which constitutes Jonathan's muscle maturity is however not just some kind of metaphorical layering, but, rather, is itself a "material duration" (Neimanis & Walker, 2014, p. 13) of the density, hardness, and separation which Jonathan refers to as "great muscle maturity and great conditioning".

Interestingly, in discussing the bodybuilding concept of "muscle memory" in a photo-encounter with Bert and an autophotograph (See Figure K) of his right quadricep muscle, time could also be seen to co-participate in how his years of weight training and personal sacrifice could be materially quantified through/with/across his built muscle:

→**Insert Figure K Here**←

Muscle memory develops through years of training and a lot of sacrifices. Like in the shot I took here [[Picks-up Figure K from table]] I can say my quad has a good memory for the shape it needs to have. Even if I had to stop training for a couple of months, I know my quads could bounce back quickly if I started [training] again. That's good muscle memory. But this is something you only get from training with consistently good technique. I've always had an uncompromising focus on form. That's never going to change.

Sport science literature has broadly defined muscle memory as the enhanced ability of muscle to more quickly achieve desired levels of size and strength after a period of inactivity (Shusterman, 2011; Staron et al., 1991). Dachis (2011) explains that muscle memory is "not a memory stored in your muscles ... but memories stored in your brain that are much like a

¹⁶³ This would represent a geometrical frame of reference for time that renders it the composite of ontologically disparate time-zones separated by (linear) distances of spacetime (Barad, 2007).

cache of frequently enacted tasks for your muscles” (para. 1). Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that muscle memory is a physiological capacity dependent on the combined development of neural networks and tissue adaptations in muscle activated from years of (weight) training and exercise (Shusterman, 2011; Staron et al., 1991). For Friedman (2006) and Shusterman (2011), the concept of muscle memory has provocative anti-Cartesian connotations because it suggests a more significant role for bodily materiality in the formation of memories – a notable departure from a largely mentalised model of memory which localises memory capacity in the mind (Butler, 1989), generally, and the brain (Squire, 1987), more specifically.

In Bert’s description of muscle memory, he suggests that the quadricep muscle pictured in his autophotograph (See Figure K) has a memory for “the shape it needs to have”, that is, in other words, a memory for the aesthetic qualities on which male bodybuilders’ quadricep muscularity is competitively adjudicated. For Bert, this kind of “good” muscle memory is one which is materially cultivated “through years of training and a lot of sacrifices”. In this regard, Bert’s remarks about his training emphasise how developing a muscle memory for the competitively favoured aesthetic criteria of men’s bodybuilding implicates “[b]odily movement ... in both the production and storage of memory” (Friedman, 2006, p. 160), as opposed to just Cartesianesque cognitive activity.

Furthermore, Bert’s description of the materially embodied basis of muscle memory also disrupts the reframing of time into a linear, continuous, and inactive past, present, and future. For Bert, his muscle memory is not so much a holding of (a) time in stasis, that is, in (a) “place” (be this place a specific part of his muscle or a chronological timespace stored in his mind), only for it to be (cognitively) recalled back from “the past” (there/then) into the “the present” (here/now). Rather, Bert’s muscle memory is materially (re)formed through/with/across the thick time of a past↔present↔future characterised by a focus on

what he calls “consistently good technique”. In doing so, the multi-temporal force of his past↔present↔future weight training becomes intra-actively enfolded through/with/across the musculature of his quadriceps, in effect trans-corporeally co-producing a muscle memory which is itself thick/thicker/thickened with the material, discursive, and affective forces of an approach to building muscle which entails what he describes as an “uncompromising focus on form”, that is, exercise technique.

While Bert had alluded to the competitive importance of a bodybuilder developing, in his words, “good muscle memory”; Peter brought to attention how less desirable muscle memories could also be developed by a bodybuilder:

→Insert Figure L Here←

Peter: ... my right bicep tore off from the connecting tissue¹⁶⁴. Although I [[Points to the last competitor on the right in Figure L]] have been told it is healed up now I still think my right arm is smaller than my left arm. But training is still a balancing act. My left arm can take a lot more weight so I can train it harder and it will grow bigger, while my right arm is noticeably smaller. Which is a problem so I have to hold back on the weights for my left arm. My right bicep¹⁶⁵ really can’t take as much weight. Now all this gives me hassles when it comes to upper body symmetry. Judges have told me that my main rival for my division [[Points to the second competitor from the left in Figure L]] always pips me to the post on upper body symmetry.

Jarred: You seem quite upset about it?

Peter: Well it makes me feel defeated. I don’t know now if I’m ever really ever going to be able to escape this injury.

In the photo-encounter between Peter, his autophotograph (See Figure L), and I, it is clear that Peter laments his right bicep’s inability to “forget” the injury it sustained six years ago. The aesthetic-adjudicative criteria which require muscular symmetry in men’s competitive bodybuilding means that Peter’s left bicep should never be disproportionately

¹⁶⁴ Roughly six years ago during a set of dumbbell-presses Peter opted to train with a set of dumbbells much heavier than he had ever trained with before. During the end of his last set Peter’s right arm buckled under the weight of the dumbbell and in continuing to hold on to it, in an attempt to control its descent, the dumbbell ripped his right bicep muscle from the tendons connecting the muscle to his shoulder joints.

¹⁶⁵ See Appendix C for an illustrative identification of the bicep muscle.

more muscular in size, shape, or definition than his right bicep. Thus, when Peter trains his arms he highlights how he attempts to “balance” the muscular development of each arm in order to avoid developing an asymmetrical upper body and, in turn, being competitively penalised for asymmetry.

The “balancing act” that Peter describes having to perform every time he trains his arms draws attention to the intra-active enfolding of the material past↔present↔future of his bicep injury through/with/across his competitive muscle-building practices. On the one hand, Peter’s left bicep must be, in his words, “held back” in training from heavier weights and, in turn, from futures where his left bicep becomes comparatively more muscular in size and shape. On the other hand, and at the same time, the muscles of his right bicep remain unable to, in his words, “escape”, their injury.

For Peter, it is clear that both he and his right bicep will always remain haunted by the material force of time or, in other words, the muscle memory of his right bicep’s injury; whether it be on times when his eyes are visually pulled to his right bicep in photographs of his physique (as in Figure L), or on times when the physiological weaknesses of his right bicep force it to fail under heavier weights during his upper body training sessions. These times are themselves intra-actively thick/thicker/thickened through/with/across the more-than↔human relations as well as material↔discursive↔affective agencies of Peter’s injured bicep muscle, his competitive ambitions, gym equipment, photographs of his physique, and the aesthetic-adjudicative criteria of men’s competitive bodybuilding. In doing so, the temporal force (or “past”) of Peter’s muscular injury is “never left behind, never finished once and for all” (Barad, 2007, p. 234), but, rather, always already comes to performatively co-participate in the trans-corporeal (un/re)making of the temporal trajectories (or “present” and “futures”) that mark Peter’s competitive bodybuilding career and his competitive muscular development.

5.7. Bodybuilding more-than↔human muscle: A summary.

In this chapter I explored how the muscle of competitive male bodybuilders participating in this study becomes materially co-constituted through/with/across trans-corporeal relations with their more-than-human worlds. Through the analyses presented I traced how the materialities of male bodybuilders' muscle intra-actively (e)merges through/with/across competitive muscle-building practices which entail the co-participation of both human and more-than-human material↔discursive↔affective agencies that performatively work to co-produce muscle. In doing so, the muscle of competitive male bodybuilders becomes materially built in ways which make it always already more-than↔human muscle.

In the first section, I sought to trans-corporeally trans-gress/form/mogrify the Western, humanocentric, and patriarchal tropes which have operated within the subcultural rhetoric and practices of competitive bodybuilding to render male bodybuilders a Cartesian composition of a hierarchically bifurcated mind and body. In developing Floyd Merrell's concept (2003) of "bodymind" (p. 19) through/with/across the more-than↔human perspective of trans-corporeality, I sought to draw attention to the ways in which materially embodied and emplaced interconnections develop when bodybuilders are immersed not just in, but, rather, through/with/across the material↔discursive↔affective agencies of "the zone". When building muscle through/with/across "the zone", the Cartesian and binarising discourses of "mind over matter" or "matter over mind" become increasingly analytically untenable as both human and more-than-human agencies cohere to intra-actively co-produce a (trans-)corporeally attuned musclemind.

In the second section, I put trans-corporeality to work in dismantling the great corporeal barrier which has often enclosed Hu/Man(ist) subjectivity and embodiment from the more-than-human world, namely, the skin. The surface of human skin has historically "mark[ed] the beginning of the world and simultaneously the boundary of the self" (Stelarc,

2000, p. 118) within Western humanocentric culture. Through a trans-corporeal lens, bodybuilders' skin is "more than simply a text on which the social is written" (Mansfield & McGinn, 1993, p. 67); rather, through/with/across the competitive practices which together prepare the bodybuilder's body, muscle, and skin for the competitive stage, the matter/material/materiality of their skin is rendered a sensual "organ of physical and psychical inter-change" (Shildrick, 2012, p. 171) that comes to materially co-participate in the competitive readying and readiness of their physique.

In the third section, I turned to the dietary relations competitive male bodybuilders have with food. According to Alaimo (2008), the material relations that humans have with food can often be seen as "the most palpable example of trans-corporeality" (p. 253) because of the ways in which the more-than-human matter of food trans-fuses/forms/mogrifies the human body, at the most intimate of histological scales. In analytically mapping male bodybuilders' dietary and nutritional practices through/with/across Jane Bennett's (2010) formulation of "eating as ... an assemblage" (p. 49) and Susan Hekman's (2010) "mangle" (p. 23), I was able to trace the trans-corporeal transit of food through/with/across the competitively oriented assemblages of their eating practices and, to this effect, develop a far more capacious and less humanocentric analytic of their metabolisms. In addition, I highlighted how the material↔discursive↔affective force(s) of food performatively works in co-producing the peculiar, complex, and shifting arrangements of bodybuilders' nutritional supplementation which molecularly (un/re)make their metabolisms and, in turn, the preparation of their physiques and musculature for the competitive stage.

In the fourth section, I explored competitive male bodybuilders' practices of chemical bodybuilding. In engaging competitive male bodybuilders use of steroids through/with/across the conceptual lens of Nancy Tuana's (2008) "viscous porosity" (p. 200), it became increasingly evident how chemically built muscle becomes materially co-constituted by the

agencies of xenobiotic AASs and PPEs. To this effect, what the trans-corporeal relations of steroid use bring to attention are the ways in which male bodybuilders' muscle intra-actively (e)merges "in composition with nonhumanity, never outside of a sticky web of connections" (Bennett, 2004, p. 365) which chemically saturates their flesh. In this regard, competitive male bodybuilders' steroid use comes to entail multiple material agencies, including, syringes, chemical solutions of AASs and PPEs, as well as other bodily materialities, such as, blood – all of which intra-actively exercise what Jane Bennett (2004) refers to as a "thing-power" (p. 348) in moulding the experience and practices of steroid administration.

In the fifth section, I turned to gym equipment. Although weights and weight training equipment are often considered to be the competitive bodybuilder's "tools of the trade" (English, 2013, p. 79), that is, in other words, the inanimate objects used to stimulate and sustain muscular growth and development; the analysis presented here highlighted the dynamic and trans-corporeal ways in which gym equipment does not simply serve to magnify the exceptionalism or agency of the human bodybuilder. Through/with/across the assistance of Donna Haraway's (2008) "becoming-with" (p. 38), I mapped how the muscle of competitive male bodybuilders is materially built through/with/across the active co-participation of gym equipment.

In the sixth section, I considered the role and influence of time in building muscle. Although time is typically understood as a universal, linear, and passive backdrop to the progressive and incremental practices of building muscle; drawing on the trans-corporeal inspired device of "thick time" (Neimanis & Walker, 2014, p. 4) as well as the intra-active reworking of time, space, and matter in Karen Barad's (2007) "spacetime-matter" (p. 142), I was able to trans-corporeally trace how the material force of time performatively works in materially (re)building and (re)shaping the muscle of competitive male bodybuilders.

In this chapter I provided a feminist-inflected and posthumanist analysis of competitive male bodybuilders' muscle and their muscle-building practices through/with/across Stacy Alaimo's trans-corporeality. In doing so, I sought to deliberately decentre the humanocentric gaze typical of existing bodybuilding scholarship and, at the same time, the humanocentric, patriarchal, Cartesian, and largely Western values and discourse of bodybuilding subculture. A trans-corporeal rendering of competitive male bodybuilders, their muscle, and their muscle-building practices offers the kind of radically relational analytic needed to more fully map the multifarious ways in which the material↔discursive↔affective agencies of bodybuilders' muscle as well as their more-than-human world(s) actively co-participate in the material building of muscle for competition.

To this effect, in the following chapter, I build on the analysis offered here by further exploring how the muscle of competitive male bodybuilders becomes gendered through/with/across the trans-corporeal relations between their muscle and their more-than-human world(s).

“I took 6 weeks off squatting, grew a vagina, and did leg press. Squat numbers went seriously backwards.”

- A male bodybuilder concisely captures the material↔discursive↔affective tensions which are always co-implicated and co-produced through/with/across the more-than↔human relations of a leg-press machine, his muscle, and the matter/materiality of his sex/gender/gex, in Aaron Smith and Bob Stewart’s *Body Perceptions and Health Behaviours in an Online Bodybuilding Community* (2012, p. 976).

CHAPTER 6: GENDER-BUILDING MORE-THAN↔HUMAN MUSCLE

In this chapter I explore how South African competitive male bodybuilders' muscle becomes gendered. Having examined, in the previous chapter, how the muscle of competitive male bodybuilders intra-actively materialises through/with/across trans-corporeal relations between competitive male bodybuilders, their muscle, and their more-than-human world(s); this chapter shifts focus to consider how the material agencies of their muscle and their more-than-human world(s) also co-participates in the gender(ed)-building of male bodybuilders' muscle. The aim of this chapter is to therefore address the second dimension of the research question orientating this thesis, namely: How do the trans-corporeal relations between South African competitive male bodybuilders and their more-than-human world(s) work in *gendering* their muscle, for competitive participation?

This chapter is divided into four sections of analysis which map, in a non-exhaustive way, the trans-corporeal relations through which the muscle of male bodybuilders participating in this study becomes gendered. In the first section, I focus on the subculturally dominant competitive aesthetic of muscular “freakishness” amongst male bodybuilders. Here, I trace how some of the muscle-building practices implicated in competitively building freakish muscularities (re)produce both material↔discursive and trans-corporeal relations which (de)stabilise the ways in which muscular freakery also becomes gendered. Juxtaposed with muscular freakishness, in the second section, I consider how more normative renderings of gender, generally, and masculinity, more specifically, are recuperated through/with/across the trans-corporeal relations of those competitive male bodybuilders who identify and compete as “classic” bodybuilders. In the third section, I examine how the competitive gender(ed)-building of muscle, for this group of male bodybuilders from South Africa, always already entails structurally situated trans-corporeal relations which co-implicate the contextually unique racialisation of their bodies and their muscle, in ways which are

simultaneously material↔discursive. Finally, in the fourth section, I examine how the subcultural confines of the gym materially shapes the gendered/ing experience of muscle and muscle-building practices for competitive male bodybuilders. Throughout the autophotographic and photo-encounter work of this study, gyms recurrently received the most attention by the participating bodybuilders as both a personally and subculturally significant gendered/ing space. It is, in this regard, that particular attention is placed on the use of affect as a way of more fully exploring how the material spatialities of bodybuilders' gyms actively co-participate in the gender(ed)-building of their muscle. Following this, a fifth section concludes the chapter.

Throughout this chapter I continue to decentre the agency of the competitive male bodybuilder through Stacy Alaimo's work on trans-corporeality in an effort to disrupt those patriarchal, Cartesian, neoliberal, and Western tropes which reiterate the competitively oriented gender(ed)-building of male bodybuilders' muscle as an effect of "personal choice and action" (Lindsay, 1996, p. 357) or the product of subculturally circumscribed discursive inscription (Moore, 1997). I contend that by explicitly or implicitly maintaining a subcultural narrative that aggrandises the male bodybuilder as omnipotently capable of (re)making and (re)building the gender of their body, be it in ways which recuperate (Klein, 1993a; Wiegers, 1998), transgress (Richardson, 2012), or even Queer (Richardson, 2004; Schippert, 2007) social norms of masculine embodiment through competitively oriented muscular development, only serves to reinscribe a humanocentric bias which analytically neuters the dynamic ways in which the material agencies of their muscle and their more-than-human world(s) co-participate through the trans-corporeal relations which gender their muscle – and sometimes in ways that the male bodybuilder has little conscious control over.

6.1. Gender-building/bending/breaking the mould(s) of Man: Freaks, monsters, and a man with tits.

“Freaks” (Hotten, 2004; Lindsay, 1996; Richardson, 2012; Schippert, 2007; Staszal, 2009), “monsters” (Liokaftos, 2012), “beasts” (Giraldi, 2009), and “animals” (Locks 2012a; Saltman, 2003): these are just some of the peculiar characterisations which subculturally identify the physiques of modern day competitive male bodybuilders. Amongst these, the freak represents a “huge, ungainly creature” (Fussell, 1991, p. 194) of massive ultra-ripped muscle which is a “distinct and distinguishing status” (Liokaftos, 2012, p. 10) amongst male bodybuilders. From male bodybuilders who “habitually [and interchangeably] use the term ‘freak’ or ‘monster’ to speak of each other” (Liokaftos, 2012, p. 10, quotations original) in everyday parlance; to the top professional bodybuilders who are marketed through a “representational strategy of enfreakment” (Richardson, 2012, p. 182). Today, the discourse of muscular freakery, freakishness, and monstrosity permeates almost all facets of men’s competitive bodybuilding (Staszal, 2009).

With the rise of the freak aesthetic to a position of subcultural dominance in men’s competitive bodybuilding (Liokaftos, 2012); so too has the extreme hyper-muscularity of the freak come under critical scrutiny for the ways in which this bodily aesthetic links to traditionally defined constructions of male/masculine/men’s bodies (Liokaftos, 2012; Richardson, 2004; Schippert, 2007). For Jack, one of South Africa’s few IFBB “pro” bodybuilders, and a self-identified freak; developing freakishly massive muscles were a competitive endeavour primarily defined by a resistance to the societal conventions for male/masculine/men’s bodies, and the way he experienced these conventions as prescribing limitations to muscular development:

→Insert Figure M Here←

... why would anyone want to be limited by what society says they should look like? Sure maybe society says a man must look like this or like that. A freak like me doesn't accept any limits. Freaks break that mould. So, I have to push the limits of what is normal because normal only holds back my development. Do you know what I had to *do* to get my physique to this level? [[Gestures to Figure M]]. A freak has to do what an ordinary man can't do. A freak must tell his girlfriend he can't take her out for dinner because he has to go train. A freak must put up with the cramping for four hours after an intra-muscular injection. A freak must be able to live through starving himself for weeks ahead of a competition. I would say it's like any top, elite sportsman who puts their body on the line to break records or achieve greatness. So I'm prepared to do whatever it takes to be the best.

From the above photo-encounter, it is evident that Jack stresses how his sense of freakishness (e)merges through a deliberate violation of gendered body norms for males/men. According to Jack, his own muscular freakishness is materially constituted not just by the massive proportions of muscle he has managed to accrete, but, also, by how those muscles discursively trans-gress/form/mogrify the bodily schematic that identify him as a (Hu/)Man.

Jack's description of how bodybuilding freaks "break the mould" of male/men's normatively gendered bodies fits descriptions of freakishness that have appeared in over three decades of freak theory scholarship (Bogdan, 1988, 1996; Fiedler, 1978; Grosz, 1991, 1996; Thomson, 1996). In Leslie Fiedler's (1978) classic account of bodily freakery, freakishness designates the disruption of those (gendered) body norms that have typically come to frame the aesthetic interpretation of (biologically sexed male and female) human bodies in patriarchal Western civilisation. Yet, freakishness is not solely defined by the presence of biological or developmental anomalies, but, also, by bodily practices which alter and modify the material form of the human body (Bogdan, 1996). Through the rhetorical question Jack poses during our discussion: "Do you know what I had to *do* to get my physique to this level?"; he highlights that the competitive muscle-building practices, including, the substantive weight training, steroid use, and dieting, that he makes reference to, are what push his substantive accumulation of muscle beyond "the limits of what is normal".

In this regard, Jack highlights how his own muscular freakishness is a matter of practice, that is, a becoming which is performatively (re)produced through competitive muscle-building practices which do not bend to the materially-limiting (discursive) conventions which circumscribe the gendered appearance of male/masculine/men's bodies. However, it is also through these competitive practices that the materialities of his freakish muscle are both built and, at the same time, enfolded with contradicting discourses and performances of masculinity. On one hand, Jack states how his competitive practices destabilise what he considers to be socially normative behaviour for men, that is, in his words: "A freak has to do what an ordinary man can't do". On the other hand, Jack also invokes the bodybuilding freak in terms of the gendered figuration of what he calls the "top, elite sportsman" – a move which, at least rhetorically, stabilises the reproduction of traditional and more socially acceptable performances of masculinity through the deployment of mainstream sporting discourse which designate him as a committed and dedicated athlete.

Interestingly, both Mike Messner (1992) and Raewyn Connell (1995) have long argued that the corporeal destruction of men's bodies through physically demanding and injurious sport practice¹⁶⁶ is embedded and embodied in the (re)assertion of patriarchal versions of masculinity – a finding which has significant resonance in critical studies of how men's bodies become traditionally gendered and masculinised through participation in competitive sport (Hoberman, 1992; Howe, 2001; Hughes & Coakley, 1991; Maguire, 1993; Young, White, & McTeer, 1994). In likening the freak to an elite sports-Man, it is hard to ignore the way Jack (re)asserts how his freakish body is put "on the line" through painful and potentially risky trans-corporeal relations and practices in order to "achieve greatness". In this sense, Jack reveals his own freakish levels of muscularity come to be co-constituted through/with/across more-than↔human muscle-building practices which materially forge

¹⁶⁶ In particular, sport which is "body-contact confrontational" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 833).

freakish volumes of muscle that simultaneously entail discourses of a steadfast masculinism and an uncompromising athleticism “oriented towards achievement, dominance, power and control” (Loland, 1999, p. 298).

In studying the broader historical emergence of freakery in bodybuilding, Liokaftos (2012) argues that a “paradigm of elite performance” (p. 179) is what normalises and, simultaneously, subculturally elevates ascetic muscle-building practices that make freakish physiques both materially possible and discursively viable, particularly in modern day bodybuilding. To this effect, Jack’s interpolation of freakish muscularity through discourses of sporting dominance shows how (at least in this instance) the materialisation of his freakish muscularity does not necessarily break the gendered/ing social conventions of male/masculine/men’s bodies, as Jack had originally contended in our photo-encounter, but, rather, materialises muscle which is “naturalized and domesticated” (Stewart, 1993, p. 109) through a traditionally masculine ideology of dominance which suffuses the ways he constructs, experiences, and performs his muscle-building practices both in his own bodymind and in the more-than↔human relations which are pursued with the aim of sustaining his competitive freakery.

Interestingly, Jack asserts that he approaches his muscle-building in a way that entails doing “whatever it takes to be the best”; highlighting further how the quest for freakishness often requires a “no-holds-barred” orientation to competitive bodybuilding (Liokaftos, 2012). While this strategy is common amongst competitive bodybuilders who desire more freakish levels of muscle (Liokaftos, 2012); for Kuben, it was evident when he discussed his plans to enlist more substantial chemical assistance to achieve a freakish physique of his own:

→**Insert Figure N Here**←

... this is the name of the game if you want freaky big muscle [[Collects Figure N from set of autophotographs laid out in front of him]]. That’s the truth. It’s about taking steroids. Hold on. That’s incorrect. It’s not about taking steroids. It’s about

taking more and more steroids. You have to completely clusterfuck your body to win shows nowadays. I laugh because I have so much shit flowing through my veins I'm like a test-tube baby.

Richardson (2012) has argued that the sharp spike in the number of freakishly muscular physiques in contemporary generations of men's competitive bodybuilding is largely underpinned by "advancements in training, nutrition, and pharmaceutical drugs" (p. 194) – a sentiment seemingly echoed in Kuben's remark that increasing levels of steroid use amongst competitive male bodybuilders are the "name of the game if you want freaky big muscle". Kuben's belief that building competition-worthy freakishness hinges on a practice of "taking more and more steroids" suggests that muscular freakishness is not merely a visual aesthetic, but, moreover, an embodied form of material↔discursive practice that is specifically co-created through the use of an:

arsenal of pharmaceuticals: not only *anabolic steroids*, which help ... build more muscle through improved strength levels, metabolism, and recuperation; but also *human growth hormone* in conjunction with *insulin* for retaining muscle mass while restricting calories to create the 'lean' (fat-free) look; and *diuretics* that are used in the days leading up to a contest to rid the body of fluids in order to produce the 'dry' ('see-through') look. (Liokaftos, 2012, p. 194, quotations original, emphasis added).

Echoing Liokaftos' (2012) observation, Kuben stresses that building freakish mounds of muscle require materially intimate exchanges with an ever-growing chemistry-set of AASs and PPEs: a trans-corporeal entanglement he likens to a "clusterfuck"¹⁶⁷.

According to Kuben, his freakishness (e)merges through/with/across a trans-corporeal "traffic in toxins" (Alaimo, 2008, p. 260); a chemical "clusterfuck" of AASs and PPEs. It is difficult to ignore the affective "hothouse of sexual relations" (Williams, 2010, p. 42) that charges Kuben's description of this trans-corporeal "clusterfuck". For Kuben, this more-than↔human material entanglement is one in which the viscous porosity of his Hu/Man body

¹⁶⁷ The phrase "clusterfuck" has its origins in military-speak (Gourevitch & Morris, 2008). It broadly refers to multiple (often systemic) failures during the course of an operation which ultimately ends in its total failure.

becomes freakishly “fucked” through a toxic orgy that intra-actively materialises his chemically sodden flesh – to such an extent that he discursively trans-fuses/figures/poses the body of his freakish muscularity through/with/across the body of a “test-tube baby”¹⁶⁸.

The trans-corporeal tale of test-tubery that Kuben weaves through his bodymind draws attention to the “markedly nonnormative delivery room support team” (Barad, 2015, p. 393) that has a hand in the birth of Kuben’s freakish muscularity – a birth that appears largely the (by)product of “xenobiotic substances ... cut[ting] through the ostensible outline of the [Hu/Man] self” (Alaimo, 2018a, p. 49). In highlighting the chemical catalogue of xenobiotics that co-constitute his flesh, Kuben draws attention to how freakishness intra-actively materialises through/with/across the work of trans-corporeal relations (e)merging between his muscle and the more-than-human world. In this regard, Kuben’s account of muscular freakery offers a contrary view to the Cartesian and humanocentric assumptions which underwrite the persistent subcultural narrative that the achievement of muscular freakery is solely (self-)determined by the male bodybuilder’s choice and willpower.

Yet, for many of the participating bodybuilders, attaining freakishness, especially through and with the aid of AASs and PPEs, also often entailed Other(ed/ing) “unexpected transits and crossings” (Alaimo, 2018b, p. 437). Such was the case when Etienne drew attention to an autophotograph (See Figure O) of his “bitch tits”:

→Insert Figure O Here←

Etienne: They’re called bitch tits because it looks like you’ve got a pair women’s tits on your chest. ... If there’s too much testosterone in your system your body naturally activates this enzyme aromatase which converts the high levels of testosterone in your body to oestrogen. The oestrogen makes your nipples swell. If I don’t correct that by introducing a good oestrogen inhibitor then I’m going to rock-up [to a competition] with a pair of tits that are going to throw off my entire aesthetic. I’ll be a man with tits.

¹⁶⁸ According to McLaren (2012) it is not uncommon for the socially constructed figuration of the so-called “test-tube baby” to feature in Western cultural imaginaries as a signifier of non-natural freakery or weirdness.

Jarred: Would it affect how you're scored and where you place?

Etienne: No doubt. The judges are going to evaluate my physique against what a man must look like. I wouldn't fit in to what they are looking for. Look at female bodybuilders. Female bodybuilders are extinct. It's because what they were doing was too freakish. It's that mixing of male muscle on a woman's body. The same applies to us [male competitors]. We all know that a hard, square chest looks good on a guy, not breasts. Even now I'm still battling to get rid of mine so I have to keep them under wraps.

Firstly, from this photo-encounter with Etienne and the autophotographic image of his "bitch tits", it is clear how Etienne's comments demonstrate that the competitive aesthetic of freakishness has "different purchase for men and women" (Schipper, 2007, p. 162) who are bodybuilders. Etienne's reference to female bodybuilders as "freakish" is indicative of what Boyle (2005) has described as the "growing intolerance for female hypermuscularity and persistence of sexism within bodybuilding" (p. 135). For Etienne, the female bodybuilder's "mixing of male muscle on a woman's body", constitutes a derogatory freakishness; and while compiling what he believes to be the inherent bodily features of biologically sexed male and female bodybuilders' bodies, he catalogues breasts and breast tissue as naturally female/feminine. Thus, for Etienne, inadvertently growing a pair of "bitch tits" also comes to materialise a degree gendered/ing freakiness which even he considers too freaky for the subculturally prized freak aesthetic of competitive male bodybuilders.

According to Duchaine (1989) the term "bitch tits" is a "crude and cruel way of describing male gynecomastia, the swelling of male breast tissue and associated benign tumour growth" (p. 52). "Bitch tits" are the result of the bio-chemical processes of the body aromatising excess testosterone into oestrogen; a common consequence amongst competitive male bodybuilders using AASs. These breast-like protuberances are however not the only gender-bending trans-gression/formation/mogrification that competitive male bodybuilders may experience through/with/across their AAS use. According to Simpson (1994), male bodybuilders' use of AASs can also often make "testicles atrophy, penises shrink and

erections ... infrequent or cease altogether” (p. 41). Noting the changes often induced by AASs, some critical commentary on men’s bodybuilding has suggested that the competitive male bodybuilder’s road to muscular freakdom is in fact a corporeally trans-gendering journey (Tuana, 1996; Simpson, 1994).

According to Fussell (1994), Bolin (1997), Parsi (1997), Richardson (2004), and Schippert (2007), the extreme body modification practices entailed in competitively building muscle Queers bodybuilders’ bodies. In particular, Richardson (2004) has argued that the extreme muscular proportions brought on by male bodybuilders’ exorbitant chemical alchemy “offers the queer potential of making “gender trouble”, if only because such freaky, manipulated bodies force the spectator to consider what a supposedly “normal” body, clearly delineated along the sex–gender–sexuality matrix, actually is” (p. 64, quotations original). In mapping both the material↔discursive and trans-corporeal relations between Etienne, his swollen nipples, and his (miscalculated) use of AASs, it is evident that he becomes gendered through/with/across these more-than↔human relations as, what he refers to, “a man with tits”. For Etienne, this is a freakishly gendered trans-gression/formation/mogrification akin to the way he sees female bodybuilders’ meddling with, in his words, “male muscle”.

When Etienne asserts that “a hard, square chest looks good on a guy, not breasts”, it is evident that his own subcultural bodymind has been layered with a Western iconography of male/masculine/men’s bodies as part of which well-defined muscular chests symbolise “power and physical strength, [and] thus masculinity” (Beagan & Saunders, 2005, p. 163). In this regard, Bell and McNaughton (2007) have found that the recent emergence of “man-boobs” in the modern day lexical morass describing men’s bodies has become a “humiliating source of mockery” (p. 124) for men – and not only because they are likened to female/feminine/women’s breasts, but, also, because their gelatinous adiposities fail to conform to the materialities of hardness favoured in men’s bodybuilding, specifically, and

Western patriarchal culture, more broadly (Jefferson, 1998, Loland, 1999). In doing so, Etienne acknowledges that his pert “bitch tits” ultimately trans-gress/form/mogrify the gendered aesthetics implicitly favoured by the adjudicative criteria for judging competitive male bodybuilders’ physiques.

For Etienne, his trans-corporeally produced trans-gendered/ing body therefore becomes, to borrow from Geoffrey Harpham (1982), a “con-fusion”: a freakish (e)merging of both biologically reductionist and culturally essentialised male/masculine/men and female/feminine/women’s morphological forms and features which, neither materially nor discursively, “fit in” the gendered aesthetics for male bodybuilders, but, rather, amorphously spill out and over those competitive criteria. By blurring both sexed and gendered boundaries, Etienne’s “bitch tits” materialise what Harpham (1982) considers to be “the essence of the grotesque” (p. 11): co-presence, that is, “the sense that things that should be kept apart are fused together” (p. 11). Interestingly, a similarly Other(ed/ing) (con-)fusion also became evident when Chad admired the muscular mass of his inner thigh muscles:

→Insert Figure P Here←

Chad: No one tells you that when you get monster legs like mine that you will need to find money to buy new pants because nothing fits them anymore. And you can check out my inner thighs. I’ve managed to get great development going along my adductors¹⁶⁹ but this means that they rub together every time I move. I’m chafing like nobody’s business. Some mates of mine even laugh at me. They call me “Penguin legs” because I look like some kind of fucked-up Penguin when I walk. But I’ve got no choice walking like this [[Stands up and begins to imitate his waddle-like walk]] because it’s the only way [of walking] that prevents my legs rubbing together. I know it doesn’t make me look normal when I walk but it’s something I have to live with.

Jarred: Why do you have to live with it?

Chad: How can I complain? I have trained so hard to get my adductors where they need to be so now I have to be prepared to let them do their own thing. Even if it annoys the crap out of me. Even if it makes me uncomfortable.

¹⁶⁹ See Appendix C.

In the above photo-encounter, Chad describes his legs as “monster legs”. The monster, like the freak, is an awe-inspiring subcultural designation denoting extreme proportions of muscle mass for male bodybuilders (Staszal, 2009); as is seen in the incredible muscle mass Chad has managed to accrete in the adductor muscles of his inner thighs.

Within the realm of cultural and literary theory, the field of monster studies has focussed on the “ontological liminality” (Cohen, 1996, p. 6) of monsters in medical science, art, literature, film, and popular discourse. The horror (and splendour) of monsters, according to Hirsch (1996), lies in the ability of the monster to reckon with “the very existence of the species of “man” ... not only materially but in an ontological and epistemological sense as well” (p. 134, quotations original). In this regard, critical figurations of the monster and monstrosity have come to function “both as Other to the normalized self, and as a third state or hybrid entity that disrupts subject constitution understood in terms of hierarchical binary dualisms” (Toffoletti, 2004, para. 4). To this effect, the freakish figuration of the monster has also proven of particular value to feminist-inflected posthumanist work¹⁷⁰ in irritating the patriarchal skins that conceptually enclose the corporeal form of the Hu/Man(ist) subject by Othering women, nature, animals, the poor/homeless/landless, Queer, Black, disabled, and the people of the global South and East as less-than-human.

Interestingly, in Chad’s autophotographic account, his enormous leg musculature appears to gain monstrous designation not only by their inability to be contained by the material fabric of his pants, but, also, by virtue of the awkward shuffle he performs as/when he walks. The waddle Chad is forced to perform as result of the monstrously muscular girth of his inner thighs ruptures the conventional image for the Hu/Man gait, that is, upright, unhindered, and unwavering. In response to this, Chad recounts that his friends ridicule his awkward waddle by calling him “Penguin legs”. Chad, no longer appearing to, in his words,

¹⁷⁰ In particular, the work of Donna Haraway (1992), Judith Halberstam (1995), Rosi Braidotti (1996), Margrit Shildrick (2002), and Stacy Alaimo (1997, 2010a).

“look normal”, becomes corporeally trans-formed/mogrified through his maladroit movement into a new kind of freakishness: “a fucked-up Penguin”, that is, a half-Man-half-Penguin, or, in other words, a “Manguin” – a kind of trans-corporeally produced polymorphic humanimal.

Interestingly, for decades now, the subcultural argot of bodybuilding has incubated an extensive range of “zoomorphisms” (Daston & Mitman, 2005, p. 3) which rhetorically construct and market the non-conventional bodies and bodily practices of men’s competitive bodybuilding (Saltman, 2003). It is therefore not unusual for kitsch phrases, such as, “having the heart of a lion”, “training like a dog”, or “developing hawkish eyes for definition”, to appear in the pages of bodybuilding magazines. In the same vein, both personal and corporate branding strategies within competitive bodybuilding have generated a variety of chimeric-like characterisations of more well-known male bodybuilders in order to inspire reverence for their monstrous muscularities, such as, for example: Roelly “The Beast” Winklaar; Flex “The Welsh Dragon” Lewis; and (the late) Paul “QuadZilla” DeMayo.

For Chad, however, unlike the aforementioned monikers, “Penguin legs” is a status of social mockery and physical irritation. When Chad’s left and right adductor muscles transit against one another chafing ensues. Despite Chad’s attempts to prevent their unseemly frotteur by means of his embarrassing shuffle his thick adductors appear to develop muscleminds of their own and, like the (Hu/)Man-made monsters of literary/filmic science-fiction, who disobey their Hu/Man masters and creators, Chad’s trans-corporeal relations through/with/across mountains of food, steroids, and the weights at his gym materialise adductor muscles that defy his will and control. These adductor muscles resist Chad, they bring into material embodiment both a personal and social discomfort that transgressively intercedes in Chad’s style of walking by re/de/trans-forming/mogrifying his bodily comportment(s) as he moves and walks.

Through the painfully persistent chafing of Chad's inner thighs he appears to have succumbed to the thing-power materialised by his adductors and has seemingly come to reconcile having to, in his words, "live with" them. Chad's assertion that he has to "let them do their own thing" highlights how his monstrous adductors scornfully chafe and chaff bodybuilding lore which compels him to strive for complete control of his body (Heywood, 2012); while, simultaneously, destabilising patriarchal and Cartesian lore that edicts Chad, as a (Hu/)Man, to ensure his mind exercises dominion over his material body (Foucault, 1966/2005).

6.2. The measure(ments) of Man: Rebuilding men through classic bodybuilding.

At the IFBB's 2005 congress in Shanghai, their Executive Council endorsed the creation of a new competitive division to fall within the ambit of men's competitive bodybuilding: classic bodybuilding. The formation of this new division for male bodybuilders competing in the structures of the IFBB (2017a), including South African affiliate, BBSA, sought to address the allegedly "increasing worldwide demand for competitions for men who prefer, unlike today's current bodybuilders, to develop a less muscular, yet athletic and aesthetically pleasing physique" (p. 3).

Since the 1990s, the debate about the steroid-fuelled sizes of competitive male bodybuilders' bodies has become more heated within the competitive community (Pietaro, 2015); with many (former) bodybuilders, promoters, and judges, calling for the IFBB to implement aesthetic-adjudicative criteria for male bodybuilders that de-emphasise the current importance on muscular size (Liokaftos, 2012; Pietaro, 2015). Seen as the antidote to an "increasingly fragmented body with over-developed body parts often celebrated and displayed over the whole" (Locks, 2012a, pp. 3-4); classic male bodybuilders' aesthetic-adjudicative criteria explicitly place emphasis on smaller levels of muscle size and girth.

In doing so, classic male bodybuilders have their overall bodyweight restricted to their height by means of a “special IFBB formula”¹⁷¹ (IFBB, 2014, para. 5). With restrictions on their size, classic bodybuilders are encouraged to focus on the development and conditioning of “proportion, symmetry, balance and detail” (Brown, 2015, p. 52). In this regard, the anthropometric measurements that contain and constrain classic bodybuilders’ muscular development are not purely arithmetic, but, rather, deliberately tied to the shifting body-politic(s) of men’s competitive bodybuilding, at least in the IFBB. This was a point highlighted by James during one of our photo-encounters:

→Insert Figure Q Here←

James: ... classic bodybuilders are really in a battle to take back the soul of bodybuilding from the freaks. For a lot of us we are trying to get some kind of natural order back to bodybuilding. We want to get bodybuilding back to presenting the natural male silhouette. So in classic bodybuilding there is a strong emphasis on the athlete’s waist to bring out that aesthetic V-taper [Picks up Figure Q]. It [the waist] must not be blocky and square like the guys on too much *juice*. This is what distinguishes us from open division athletes: broad shoulders complemented with well-defined arms that lead down via strong *lats*¹⁷² to a small waist with lean and muscular legs that don’t detract from the upper body. This is the kind of aesthetic that has a timeless classical look. It’s a Frank Zane kinda look. It emphasises lean muscle-building not just steroid, steroids, steroids and size.

Jarred: So you’re happy that classical bodybuilding is becoming more popular?

James: We have a lot more people coming to shows and it’s because the classic guys’ physiques are just a better aesthetic. The open division¹⁷³ guys are just concerned with that freak factor that really just grosses people out. The classic physique has more popular appeal to people because we don’t compromise on our proportions. What I’m trying to say is we [classic bodybuilders] are attracting people to the sport. So I’m pleased with the direction the classic measurements are going in.

In the above photo-encounter, James locates the subcultural development of men’s classic bodybuilding as a response to the freakishly large and amorphous muscularities of contemporary open division bodybuilders and, in particular, the dominant freak aesthetic. For

¹⁷¹ See Appendix B for the competitive weight-by-height categories available to classic male bodybuilders.

¹⁷² Latissimus dorsi. See Appendix C.

¹⁷³ The classic bodybuilders that participated in this research often used the phrase “open division” to designate the group of male bodybuilders typically known (inside and outside of competitive bodybuilding) as “bodybuilders”, from those designated “classic bodybuilders”. I preserve their distinction throughout the analysis presented in this section.

James, the bodies of classic male bodybuilders are defined, quite literally, by their cultivation of a lean muscular V-taper. The V-taper of broad muscular shoulders and contoured “lats” emphasised by a narrow waist, has become an increasingly central component to the adjudication of classic male bodybuilders’ physiques (Brown, 2015). For James, the narrow dimensions of lean muscle mass etched across his midsection not only constitute his embodied subjectivity as a classic bodybuilder, but, also, materially entrench through his flesh the corporeal battle lines between classic and open division bodybuilders over what he describes as the “soul of bodybuilding”.

The V-tapered upper body that bursts out from the classic bodybuilder’s narrow waistline has itself always occupied a significant place in the historical iconography of men’s competitive bodybuilding (Dutton, 1995; Locks, 2012a). The V-taper, indicative of a physique typically leaner in muscularity and smaller in size resembles the bodies of male bodybuilders from the 1950s through to the early 1970s. The lean V-taper, for classic bodybuilders, harkens back to an era of men’s bodybuilding that was yet to be completely overrun by the unabated use of steroids¹⁷⁴. This is a sentiment posited in James’ remark of how opposed he is to the muscles of his waist becoming “blocky and square like the guys on too much juice”, namely, steroids. In contrast, James’ classic muscularity is forged through/with/across a body-politic/praxis of “lean muscle-building”, the aesthetic-adjudicative criteria for classic male bodybuilders, and what he calls the “timeless classical look” from competitive male bodybuilders of a bygone era, such as, for James, the physique of Frank Zane¹⁷⁵.

¹⁷⁴ This is of course despite the fact that classic bodybuilders, like open division bodybuilders, use AASs and PPEs to develop and condition their competitive muscularities.

¹⁷⁵ Frank “The Chemist” Zane was one of the most successful professional competitive bodybuilders of his time. During the height of his career, which spanned across the 1960s, ‘70s, and early ‘80s, he won the “Mr America”, “Mr Universe”, and “Mr Olympia” titles. Zane stands out amongst other bodybuilders of his generation for being one of the leanest and lightest bodybuilders at the time of winning those titles.

For James, his own pronounced V-taper and emphasis on lean muscle development mark a return “to some kind of natural order” in men’s competitive bodybuilding; an order premised on what James calls the “the natural male silhouette”. James’ reiteration of the inherent “naturalness” of the V-taper to male/men’s bodies echoes an earlier observation by Dutton (1995) that “[t]he V-shape of the torso is a biological marker of masculinity” (p. 188). Materialised through James’ flesh, his V-taper is both materially and discursively entangled with the definitively masculinised V-taper in Western constructions of male/masculine/men’s bodies. Interestingly, Bornstein (2008) has found that a “muscular look defined by a V-taper and extreme leanness and density” (p. 29) has increasingly featured in Western cultural representations of the ideal body for men; while the V-taper has also become a sought-after body shape in the body image market of men’s bodies (Harrison & Hefner, 2014; Luciano, 2001; Pope et al., 2000). For James, the “freak factor” embodied in the “compromised proportions” of open division male bodybuilders’ bodies of camelious muscle only alienate prospective newcomers to the competitive community. Thus, for James, classic bodybuilders’ bodies of lean and unquestionably male/masculine proportions of muscle materialise a main/male-stream potential for men’s bodybuilding beyond the immediate acolytes of the competitive subculture.

James’ declaration of his satisfaction for, in his words, the “classic measurements”, further underscore how central anthropometric technologies are in quantifying and classifying classic male bodybuilders’ muscularities. Nowhere was this more tangible than in a photo-encounter with self-identified classic bodybuilder Ricky and the autophotograph (See Figure R) of his scale and tape measure:

→Insert Figure R Here←

The difference [between classic and open division bodybuilders] is that there are really strict measurements you have to adhere to qualify to compete. At weigh-ins [[Picks up Figure R]] there’s a lot of pressure to make sure I maintain lean mass. So

the scale is really judge, jury, and executioner. If there's a couple of grams extra somewhere my whole aesthetic could be out of proportion, and that means another hour of cardio. It's why I also have a tape measure [[Gestures to the tape measure coiled around the arm of his scale in Figure R]]. I have to track my measurements so that no [body] part overpowers another. Otherwise you start losing those perfect male proportions. At a [in-season competitive] weight of 70kg and height 170cm my waist should always be about 80cm, my arms should be about 40[cm], my chest between 125[cm] and 130[cm]. That's your Vitruvian Man right there.

In the above photo-encounter, Ricky highlights how bodyweight scales¹⁷⁶ function to rationalise and objectify classic bodybuilders' bodies, generally, and their muscularities, more specifically. According to Ricky, the competitive management of classic bodybuilders' physiques are underwritten by "strict measurements" outlined in their aesthetic-adjudicative criteria. Oates and Durham (2004), in their analysis of anthropometric measurements used in quantifying American footballers' bodies, also noted that "[t]he enumeration of the male form ... offers a dense transfer point of ideology ... deeply imbricated in ... [gendered] relations of power"¹⁷⁷ (pp. 319-320).

In Ricky's endeavour to cull his muscle mass and (re)shape more competitively palatable portions of muscle for the classic division, his muscles become intimately entailed through/with/across his bodyweight scale and the affective "pressure" it beckons to curtail his muscle mass. Ricky's weigh-ins can therefore be mapped as both a material↔discursive and more-than↔human entanglement through/with/across which multiple human and more-than-human bodies mutually meet, shape, and mould one another, together; including: Ricky's own bodymind; the bodyweight scale; and the body of gendered aesthetic-adjudicative criteria for classic bodybuilders. Through the performative relations which constitute Ricky's weigh-ins,

¹⁷⁶ In competitive bodybuilding, bodyweight scales typically have two important uses: (1) during competitive preparation, the scale gauges an estimate of a bodybuilder's progress in overall bodyweight gain, maintenance, or loss (depending on whether a bodybuilder is in their bulking or cutting phase); and (2) during the backstage competitive weigh-in, the scale measures a bodybuilder's overall bodyweight for the purpose of placement in a competitive weight-class.

¹⁷⁷ As has been the case for the centuries over which female/feminine/women's bodies have been subjected to varying forms of anthropometric measurement which seek to materially mould, control, and gender their body shape (Bordo, 1993).

the bodyweight scale is intra-actively materialised as “judge, jury, and executioner”. For Ricky, as a classic bodybuilder, the bodyweight scale therefore comes to wield an undeniably punitive force capable of rendering a verdict that sentences him to another hour-long cardiovascular training session. It therefore appears that it is not so much Ricky who only weighs-in on his scale, but, rather, the bodyweight scale that also weighs-in (and weighs heavily) on Ricky.

Not to be left out during Ricky’s weigh-in, his tape measure also becomes materially and discursively entangled through/with/across his bodyweight scale, the materialities of his muscle, and the competitive materialisation of his gendered classic physique¹⁷⁸. Simpson (1994) has described this phenomenon as “the tyranny of the tape-measure” (p. 33) in men’s competitive bodybuilding: where all parts of the muscular physique are incessantly measured, and those “inches measure the man” (p. 33). According to Ricky, his tape measure allows him to track not only his muscular development, but, also, the degree to which he corporeally embodies and measures-up to the explicitly gendered and subculturally constructed body of the classic male bodybuilder, which Ricky identifies as the “Vitruvian Man”. According to Brown (2014), Leonardo da Vinci’s fifteenth-century *Vitruvian Man* has come to serve as the embodied guideline for muscular development amongst classic male bodybuilders. The bodily dimensions and symmetry of the *Vitruvian Man* have reached such canonical proportions in classic bodybuilding lore that this Western image of male/masculine/men’s corporeal perfection has become the standard-bearer for an apparently enumerable standard of bodily and muscular faultlessness (Brown, 2015) – a sentiment also evident when Ricky likens his participation in classic bodybuilding to a project of crafting the “perfect male proportions”.

¹⁷⁸ Competitive bodybuilders would point out that a bodyweight scale would be insufficient on its own to obtain an accurate assessment of muscle development. Often bodybuilders will combine this measurement with their height, tape measure readings, as well as skin-fold measurements to ascertain their BMI or Fat-Free Muscle Mass Index (FFMI) and, thereon, calculate muscle gain, maintenance, or loss, in relation to other bodily materialities, such as, for example, bodyfat.

To emphasise this point, Ricky details the different dimensions that his waist, arms, and chest must attain in order to materially and aesthetically embody a *Vitruvian Man* of muscular perfection, for his own competitive bodyweight and height. Of vital importance for Ricky is that “no [body] part overpowers another” in the overall muscular development of his classic physique. Thus, during Ricky’s weigh-in, an ontologically more-than↔human entanglement performatively materialises through the relations between the materialities of Ricky’s muscle, the tape measure, and the competitive criteria for classic male bodybuilders; all of which are pulled into intra-action. What seemingly occurs through these material↔discursive and simultaneously more-than↔human relations is that Ricky’s bodymind becomes trans-corporeally trans/com-posed with the body (parts) of other men, namely: the aesthetic spectre of da Vinci’s *Vitruvian Man* and, at the same time, the (vaguely defined) body of an “[o]verall male athletic appearance” (BBSA, 2018c, p. 2), which is aesthetically constructed and gendered in the adjudicative criteria for classic male bodybuilders. In this regard, it is also through/with/across these trans-corporeal relations that the materialities of his lean muscular development also come to co-participate as one among many material(ising) agencies and forces which build a body of muscle definitively gendered as male/masculine/men’s muscle.

6.3. The matter of genes and cold hard cash: How race and class come to matter in gender-building the muscle of South African male bodybuilders.

Bodybuilding author James Stettler (2011) has stated emphatically that “[e]very bodybuilder who has ever risen to greatness has superior genetics” (p. 10). In one of Klein’s (1986) earliest forays into the hard-core community of Southern Californian bodybuilders he noted that most, if not all, bodybuilders considered their success at building muscle “partially

predetermined” (p. 122) by their genetic inheritance. This was a sentiment endorsed by Max when admiring an autophotograph (See Figure S) of his physique:

→Insert Figure S Here←

Your genes play a big part in your success. My physique [[Gestures to his posed physique in Figure S]] you notice I’m tall and I have long and full muscle bellies. You could say I have a mesomorphic physique. Your genes give you your body-type: mesomorph, ectomorph, or endomorph. All bodybuilders want to be a mesomorph but very few are actually blessed with the genes to be a good mesomorph. For me bodybuilding is 99% genes. That’s why I don’t understand when some bodybuilders, especially the uhm, let me say, Black guys, complain they don’t have good gyms to train at or they can’t buy supplements. I’m like, if you don’t have the genes to compete then no matter what you do you will never be successful anyway.

In the above photo-encounter, Max’s words highlight how competitive bodybuilders often rely on “facile readings of genetics” (Klein, 1993a, p. 263) to conceptualise the degree to which both they and other bodybuilders possess a “natural bodily potential” (Monaghan, 2001, p. 46) for muscle accretion and, by extension, competitive success in bodybuilding. According to Monaghan (2001) bodybuilders typically believe their genetic makeup “determine[s] the number and distribution of muscle cells in the material body and thus the possibility of achieving bodybuilding success” (p. 69). To this effect, “genetics discourse[s]” (Liokaftos, 2012, p. 145) often come to inform how competitive bodybuilders design and execute their competitive weight training, dieting, and steroid use programmes¹⁷⁹.

Interestingly, Max’s remarks demonstrate how a subculturally situated “ethnophysiological appreciation” (Monaghan, 2001) for muscle is underlined by a genetic essentialism¹⁸⁰ that gives rise to a belief in three basic body types which, to a greater or lesser extent, lend themselves to muscular development: “*endomorphs*, the naturally obese;

¹⁷⁹ The nuances and complexities of this are explored in much greater detail by Andreasson and Johansson (2016).

¹⁸⁰ According to Nelkin and Lindee (1995) “genetic essentialism” is a form of biological essentialism that “reduces the self to a molecular entity, equating human beings, in all their social, historical, and moral complexity, with their genes” (p. 2).

mesomorphs, those born stocky and muscular; and *ectomorphs*, the lanky and bony”¹⁸¹ (Fussell, 1991, p. 49, emphasis added). Amongst these body types, the mesomorphic physique, and its subculturally constructed giftedness for rapid and substantial muscle accretion, has come to be seen as the most coveted genetic prize a competitive male bodybuilder can inherit (Kennedy, 2008; Schwarzenegger & Hall, 1977) - a sentiment affirmed by Max’s statement: “All bodybuilders want to be a mesomorph but very few are actually blessed with the genes to be a good mesomorph”.

Max’s emphasis that “bodybuilding is 99% genes” carries with it a strong resonance with what Alaimo (2010a) has found to be a “widespread fixation on the gene” (p. 150) within Western humancentric thought. According to Alaimo (2010a), one of the principal ideas which continues to inform the persistence of an Enlightenment-era Hu/Man(ist) subject at the centre of Western thinking is the “popular sense of the gene as an isolated, controlling, and controllable entity” (p. 147). Interestingly, as Seymour (2015) has suggested, the ontological division that humancentric thought sustains between the gene (or Hu/Man subject) and environment (or more-than-human world) has also carried implications for the ways in which human bodies become racialised, generally, and how White bodies, more specifically, are rendered as “invulnerable, inviolable, insular, and individual” (pp. 270-271).

When Max contends: “if you don’t have the genes to compete then no matter what you do you will never be successful anyway”; both the discursive and material status of his White body materialises through/with/across a racialised genetic essentialism that, simultaneously, marks a denial of the agency of the more-than-human world, such as, in this

¹⁸¹ The three body types (or somatotypes) popularly referred to within of bodybuilding first gained empirical attention by William H. Sheldon in his *Atlas of Men: A Guide for Somatotyping the Adult Male of All Ages*, circa 1954. Sheldon (in collaboration with C. Wesley Dupertuis and Eugene McDermott) argued that heredity and body composition along dimensions of fatness (endomorph), muscularity (mesomorph), and thinness (ectomorph), held predictive value for men’s (moral) character and temperament (Vertinsky, 2007). At the time, Sheldon’s proposition quickly gained traction amongst (White, middle-to-upper-class) North American and European audiences whose desire for eugenic-like explanations of differences between the sexes as well as different races, classes, and nationalities, had become popular.

instance, training resources and nutritional supplementation, on muscle accretion. For Alaimo (2010a) “the overemphasis on genes places “the environment” - the entire material fabric of life ... - in the distant background where it plays little, if any, role” (p. 150, quotations original). In a similar sense, Max considers Black South African bodybuilders’ protestations over their inadequate resources for muscle-building as petty complaints rather than genuine concerns. The kind of environmental and structural denialism that forms a strong current through Max’s emphasis on the importance of genetic inheritance for muscular development cannot be disentangled from localised discourses amongst (many) White South Africans which: (1) rationalise the centuries of racialised oppression and marginalisation of Black South Africans; and (2) minimise the negative effects that this structural legacy has had on Black South Africans’ current social and economic (im)mobility (ENCA, 2013).

At the same time, it is notable that Max does not identify his body of muscle/genes in racial terms, but, in contrast, explicitly identifies the bodies of historically marginalised Black South African bodybuilders as Black. According to Dyer (1997) “[t]he sense of whiteness as non-raced is most evident in the absence of reference to whiteness in the habitual speech and writing of white people” (p. 2). This has played a significant role in rendering White (heterosexual, abled-bodied) male/masculine/men’s bodies as the ever-present but visibly absent normative body (Hearn, 2012a; Shilling, 2007). This is acutely felt in the South African context where a history of the systemic racialised oppression of Black (as well as Coloured and Indian) men (and women) coupled the material and symbolic statuses of their bodies to race (Epstein, 1998; Magubane, 2004; Ratele, 1998).

In this regard, it was not entirely surprising that Pule, a Black South African, not only identified his body and genes in explicitly racial(ised) terms, but, also, linked the genetic makeup of his musculature to the broader history of Black men’s bodies in South Africa:

→Insert Figure T Here←

Pule: look at my legs though [[Points to his legs in Figure T]]. My black genes are a curse. My calves¹⁸² are very small. It's genetic. All the Black guys' legs look the same. It's because we are African. Our calf muscles are bunched up; and they sit too high on the leg. It looks like we have small thin legs which makes us look top-heavy. This puts us at a disadvantage compared to the White guys because it is a lot more difficult for us to get a good balanced X-frame going.

Jarred: And you think it's a problem that most of the Black athletes deal with?

Pule: Yes. Just look at our history. When Whites came to South Africa they saw how strong Africans were. Black guys are more inclined to pick up muscle mass and density very quick. ... And that's also why they [White, European settlers and colonialists] put us [Black, indigenous Africans] in the mines. We have that natural muscular strength for work. That's why we [Black bodybuilders] can also work hard in the gym.

In the above photo-encounter, it is evident that Pule discursively splices his genetic heritage through/with/across a subcultural belief that men of different nationalities/ethnicities/races possess peculiar advantages and disadvantages in relation to developing competition-standard muscularity (Boyle, 2003; Probert, 2009). Pule contends that his "Black genes" permit him the ability to "pick up muscle mass and density very quick". Black, African, or competitive bodybuilders with darker skin tones¹⁸³, have typically been constructed as genetic frontrunners for muscle accretion in bodybuilding (Probert, 2009). Dutton (2012) refers to this when he points out that "[t]he rise to eminence of a number of black bodybuilders [has been] mainly attributable to their genetic endowment and often formidable muscularity" (p. 164). Fussell (1991) makes a similar claim that genetic-giftedness for muscular development is often found with, in his words, "Blacks" (p. 50).

For Probert (2009), however, the subculturally informed perception that darker-skinned bodybuilders are genetically advantaged remains an anachronistic hangover from colonial-era beliefs that "[m]uscularity and powerful bodies are ... natural and therefore

¹⁸² See Appendix D.

¹⁸³ Probert's (2009) work with bodybuilders in New Zealand has also revealed that the darker-skinned bodies of Maori and Pacific Island bodybuilders were perceived as genetically advantageous for muscularity, compared to competitors of European descent.

accepted as being expected in people of colour” (p. 93). Thus, what Pule considers to be the “natural muscular strength” of his Black male body cannot be extricated from the peculiar history of colonial and Western race science that established discriminatory “biological differences between different (i.e., black and white) bodies” (Saint-Aubin, 2005, p. 23). In South Africa, this kind of eugenics-inflected ideology informed the racialised division of labour under the system of apartheid which force-fed the bodies of Black men (and women) into manual forms of servitude¹⁸⁴ (Guy & Thabane, 1988). For Pule, however, the perceived “natural” capacity of his Black biologically sexed male body to be more physiologically suited to the rigours of physical labour is rhetorically reconstructed as an advantage for building muscle. This is underpinned by Pule’s belief in the ability of his Black body and muscle to materially absorb the arduous weight training which bodybuilding entails. Yet, despite this advantage, Pule also suggests that his “black genes are a curse”, particularly when it comes to the development of his calf muscles.

According to Pule, his genetic predisposition to inherently under-developed calf muscularity places him, as well as other Black bodybuilders, at a competitive disadvantage to White bodybuilders, because of what he refers to as the “top-heavy” look of his physique. Of concern for Pule is the way this “top-heavy” look comes into aesthetic conflict with the more competitively preferred and gendered proportionality of, in his words, “a good balanced X-frame”, for competitive male bodybuilders. For male bodybuilders, the “X-frame” aesthetic is widely regarded as the most competitively desirable shape for their physique (Hotten, 2004; Thorne & Embleton, 1997). As a muscularly moulded silhouette of wide shoulders which taper to a narrow hip complete with flaring quads and diamond-chiselled calves; the X-frame casts a competitively gendered(/ing) body shape for the material dimensions of the male

¹⁸⁴ In observing the role of cheap Black labour upholding the De Beers mining company, Sol Plaatje, one of the founding members of South Africa’s foremost anti-apartheid movement, the African National Congress (ANC), tellingly remarked: “their black muscle are [its] pillar” (Limb, 2009, p. 89).

bodybuilder's muscular development, specifically underpinned by an aesthetic-adjudicative emphasis on the proportionality of the upper and lower parts of their body (Monaghan, 2001).

In the aesthetic-adjudicative criteria laid out for male bodybuilders in BBSA (2018b), it is specifically emphasised that “[t]he upper body and the lower body should be in proportion” (p. 6). To this effect, male bodybuilders competing in BBSA (2018b) tournaments are expected to build a “good thigh sweep with strong development around the knee area” (p. 7) which couples to “[c]alves [which] should be full and long – balancing with the thigh” (p. 7). It is, in this regard, that Pule’s autophotograph (See Figure T) and his remarks draw attention to how the materiality/ies of his muscle become experientially intertwined through/with/across aesthetic-adjudicative criteria which co-implicate peculiarly gendered(/ing) and, at the same time, racialised(/ising) dimensions to building competitively desired proportions of lower body, leg, and calf musculature.

Anecdotally, Stettler (2011) identifies so-called “black bodybuilders” (p. 10) as genetically vulnerable to poorer calf muscularity. Similarly, Pule also implicates his African genealogy through/with/across the material under-development of his calf muscles. Pule’s perceived genetic handicap in calf muscularity, despite a well-developed upper body, is characteristic of what Probert (2009) has dubbed the “double-edged sword” (p. 315) of genetic inheritance in competitive bodybuilding, namely, that competitive successes are often stunted by one or two specific body areas that lag behind others in their muscular development.

With that said, bodybuilding lore holds that there do exist a handful of competitive male bodybuilders who are born genetically-gifted for overall, that is, full-body, muscular development:

→Insert Figure U Here←

- Neil: I'm a rare breed. Being a Coloured means that I'm a pavement special when it comes to my genetics. This is a great advantage when competing because I'm bringing the benefits from my White genes and my Black genes. My physique is the best of both worlds. So, I'm quite genetically-gifted.
- Jarred: I'm interested to know what you feel you get from what you call your White genes and your Black genes?
- Neil: Well I get a great skin colour. The Coloured skin colour is the best for bodybuilding because I don't have to spend hours tanning and bronzing like the White guys. I also don't get the crap legs that Black guys have. Have a look at the two Black guys behind me [[Refers to Figure U]]. Their legs are crap. That's where the White genes come in for me. They make up for that lack [of leg development from the Black genes]. And also, and don't take offence, a lot of our judges are still Whites, and our sponsors. Which means they come with these racist attitudes. They would rather award a trophy to me, who is a Coloured, than any of those Black guys.

In this photo-encounter, the (C/)colour(edness) of Neil's skin and identity transcorporeally transfuse through/with/across one another in such a way that he constructs his material body as a genetic jambalaya of so-called White and Black genes. Mohamed Adhikari's (2006) book, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community*, highlights that Coloured South Africans have historically been identified "in terms of the deleterious effects of racial mixture" (p. 24). For Adhikari (2006), the historical and contemporary ways in which Coloured identity in South Africa has been racialised has predominantly centred on being rendered "neither white nor African" (p. 13), but, rather, an amalgam of "racial and cultural hybridity" (p. 13) – a stigma that has historically marked the social construction of Coloured peoples' bodies (Magubane, 2004).

With this in mind, it is not unusual for Neil, who identifies as "a Coloured", to describe himself as a "pavement special" – a common South African colloquialism describing a dog of mixed, unknown, or questionable genetic lineage(s), and similar to the North American "sidewalk special" or, in more formal terms, a "mutt". Interestingly, Guzman

(2015) points out that people perceived to be of mixed racial heritage are often derogatorily labelled as mutts. For Neil, however, the disparaging association of muttiness as some sort of genetic dumpster is materially and discursively trans-lated/formed/mogrified through his muscular development into a genetic-giftedness that makes him a “rare breed” for competitive bodybuilding success.

While, according to Stettler (2011), genetic-giftedness in competitive bodybuilding “can mean many things” (p. 10); for Neil, his genetic advantage materialises through/with/across: the mocha-bronze colour of his skin; the discrimination his Black competitors face by predominantly White judging panels; and what he considers to be the near-perfect proportion and symmetry of his male physique that he attributes to the racialised mixture of his genes. Internationally, Black bodybuilders have themselves suggested that they are victim to race-based discrimination (Fair, 2003). This accusation is even more acute in South Africa where “skin colour has long served as a signifier of racial identity, and has been central to hierarchies of racial privilege” (Craig, 2012, p. 328).

Drawing from apartheid-era discourses about how different types of Blackness and Brownness involved varying degrees of power, privilege, and disadvantage (in relation to White South Africans), Neil alludes to how the racially constructed materiality of the blood-ties between Coloured and White South Africans have, to a degree, served to bring them closer together compared to the relations between Black and Coloured as well as Black and White South Africans, which remain complex and fractured (Brown, 2000). For Neil, it appears that his “White genes” come to matter not only because they counterweight the deficits in leg musculature he believes he inherits from his “Black genes”, but, also, because his “White genes” buffer him from the racism exhibited by White judges in South African bodybuilding. Neil’s remarks illustrate how South African male bodybuilders’ bodies are ultimately “woven into a larger fabric of history, culture, and power” (Alaimo, 2010a, p. 86)

that continues to shape South Africa and, in particular, malignant forms of biologically-based racism that have persisted long beyond the death of apartheid.

Neil also mentions that his Coloured muscles are more favourably entangled through/with/across a racialised distribution of financial support and sponsorship in South African bodybuilding; a point which was also highlighted by Ron:

→Insert Figure V Here←

In South Africa if you don't have the money [[Gestures towards Figure V]] and sponsorship then you really are going to struggle to compete. I have been complaining about the slow pace of transformation¹⁸⁵ in bodybuilding for a long time now. The majority of our Black athletes don't have the resources, the sponsorship, and the cold hard cash to afford what the White *okes* can afford [to compete] in terms of nutrition, supplements, and performance-enhancement. Just take the *gear*. This is going to make a huge difference to the muscle you can build. A Black athlete who can only afford to buy Chicken breasts is going to have nowhere near the mass and definition of muscle that a White athlete has who can buy those Chicken breasts and HGH, insulin, and lots of quality anabolics. The majority of [Black] athletes coming from the townships are at a high risk though. These guys can't afford to buy what Whites can. Our boys have to buy anabolics that are very suspect; but they buy them because they're cheaper. The challenge is the drugs being sold in the township or community gyms are not proper. Most of the time it's knockoff stuff. I've seen guys get sold cooking oil thinking it was testosterone. They taking a huge risk. No White athlete takes this risk!

The grossly inequitable distribution of wealth in post-apartheid South Africa shapes the everyday realities of its people in the most palpably material ways (Leibbrandt, Woolard, Finn, & Argent, 2010). Not only is South Africa considered one of the most unequal societies in the world (Adato, Carter, & May, 2006); but wealth distribution is still significantly stratified by race in such a way that "Africans are very much poorer than Coloureds, who are very much poorer than Indians/Asians, who are poorer than whites" (Leibbrandt et al., 2010, p. 9). In the above photo-encounter, Ron, a bodybuilder who self-identifies as Black, alludes to the economic challenges many historically marginalised (namely, Black, and to a lesser

¹⁸⁵ The phrase "transformation" in South African political-speak has become a much used buzzword in post-apartheid South Africa. In the most general sense, the phrase refers to those (both real and desired) efforts to dismantle apartheid-based racial(ised) inequalities that have persisted long after South Africa's transition into democracy.

extent Coloured and Indian) South African male bodybuilders face when attempting to sustain competitive careers.

Monaghan (2001) has found that competitive bodybuilders' financial means and support are an important parameter to their competitive success. Mickey Rourke echoes this in the docu-drama *Generation Iron* when he describes financial sponsorship as “[t]he support line for any bodybuilder” (Yudin, et al., 2013). The reality for a competitive bodybuilder is that their competitive participation “incurs a large financial outlay with no [guarantee of] monetary return such as prize money or sponsorship” (Monaghan, 2001, p. 68). Of all costs incurred in the competitive preparation of muscle it is often steroid use that “can prove expensive depending upon types of drugs used, frequency of use, duration, dosage and source” (Monaghan, 2001, p. 65).

According to Ron, the majority of Black South African bodybuilders coming from poorly resourced backgrounds are unable to afford the kinds of AASs and PPEs, such as, for example, HGH and insulin, that more affluent and historically advantaged (namely, White) bodybuilders are able to afford. For Ron, this places Black bodybuilders at a competitive disadvantage to their White counterparts. In this regard, it is the superior availability of what Ron describes as “cold hard cash” which structurally facilitates trans-corporeal relations with more effective chemical enhancers through/with/across the bodies of White bodybuilders.

Beyond competitive advantage, Ron also raises concerns about how money comes to matter for Black male bodybuilders by the way its structurally uneven distribution also connects to and sustains the racialised exposure to risk amongst South African bodybuilders. According to Ron, the steroids which are “sold in the township or community gyms [where Black bodybuilders train and live] are not proper”¹⁸⁶. Ron recounts how household

¹⁸⁶ Townships, also known as “locations” or “informal settlements”, are an effect of the apartheid-era *Group Areas Act* (Act 41 of 1950). The act permitted the forced removal and geographical relocation of Black, Coloured, and Indian South Africans to segregated areas, often on the periphery of White-only cities, towns, and suburbs.

substances, such as, cooking oil, have been packaged and sold as steroid products; posing potentially fatal consequences to the health of Black bodybuilders. But, as Ron emphasises, limited financial resources and the desire to maintain a competitive level of muscularity means “cheaper steroids” become an attractive prospect for Black competitive bodybuilders in South Africa.

Alaimo (2010a) suggests that mapping the trans-corporeal relations human bodies have through/with/across their more-than-human world(s) entails tracing how “human bodies, human health, and human rights are interconnected with the material, often toxic flows of particular places” (p. 62). To this effect, Alaimo’s (2008) figuration of “toxic bodies” (p. 260) proves analytically useful in (t)ricing the trans-corporeal toxicities that emerging Black male bodybuilders (particularly those coming from South African townships) are subjected to. According to Alaimo (2008) a toxic body is one which “always bears the trace of history, social position, region, and the uneven distribution of risk” (p. 261). The poverty which has been historically endemic to South African townships has often meant that these places become cauldrons of toxic structural, social, and environmental hazards (McDonald, 2004; Straker & Moosa, 1992; Wood & Jewkes, 1997). South African townships are geographic territories of heightened risk that mark if not indelibly scar many of the bodies that are forced to live and move through/with/across them, by virtue of structural circumstances¹⁸⁷ (Wood & Jewkes, 1997). Ultimately, as Ron rightfully points out, these are risks that more affluent, suburban-dwelling, and predominantly White South African male bodybuilders will likely never have to contend with.

¹⁸⁷ While it is important to acknowledge the social ills and safety risks of township life in South Africa, it is equally important to recognise that townships still form their own unique vibrant and resilient communal spaces, relations and experiences to which many Black South Africans trace deeply vested personal and familial ties.

6.4. The birthplace of brawn: How the gym affectively shapes the gender(ed)-building of muscle.

In the subcultural history of men's competitive bodybuilding gyms have been, and continue to be, bastions of brawn (Dutton & Laura, 1989; Klein, 1993a). So central are gyms to male bodybuilders' subcultural enmeshment as members of their community that even Arnold Schwarzenegger (1998) has drawn "the comparison between how environment affects the development of a child and how the gym environment can affect the development of a bodybuilder" (p. 86). Gyms not only function as the most convenient geographical locales which house all the equipment and weights necessary for competitive muscle-building and physique development, but, by virtue of bodybuilders' inordinate concentration within gyms, these spaces often become the *de facto* nurseries for the competitive bodybuilding community¹⁸⁸ (Andrews et al., 2005; Coquet et al., 2016; Klein, 1993a).

In studying the relationship that competitive male bodybuilders develop with the gym space, two major fields of literature have emerged¹⁸⁹: (1) critical autobiographical accounts from scholars who are themselves bodybuilders and have spent countless hours in the gym, such as, for example, in the work of Fussell (1991), Denham (2008), Giraldi (2009), and Solotaroff (2010); and (2) ethno-observational accounts derived from ethnographic work embedded in gyms with bodybuilders, such as, for example, in Klein (1993a), Andrews et al. (2005), and Johansson (2013). Interestingly, both streams of literature have converged in their assertion that bodybuilders often consider gyms *the* premier sites through which subcultural knowledge about competitive muscle-building is transmitted and embodied.

¹⁸⁸ It is worth noting however that the gym's subcultural centrality for competitive bodybuilders has also been supplemented by the emergence of online spaces and internet-based communities of bodybuilders (Andreasson & Johansson, 2016; Smith & Stewart, 2012).

¹⁸⁹ There is also a third type of research aligned to the study of clinical psychopathology amongst bodybuilders. For the most part, this research concentrates on measuring the amount of time bodybuilders spend in the gym as a way of quantifying an obsessional quality to muscle-building practices (Pope et al., 1997; Also see Appendix H). Needless to say, the amount of time bodybuilders spend in the gym is considerably more than the average gym-goer (For further detail see Chapter Two, Section 2.3.2.).

For this reason, much of the critical scholarship on male bodybuilders has often focussed on their phenomenological emplacement in the gym space. These analyses, although insightful, have tended to be largely humanocentric with a distinct focus on the interpersonal and subcultural dynamics that play out amongst bodybuilders against the backdrop of the gym; in effect, analytically “backgrounding” (Plumwood, 1993) the more-than-human agencies and materialities that constitute the gym space. With that said, it was hard to background the material presence and affective palpability of the gym space in the midst of Abey’s overwhelming excitement when he discussed an autophotograph (See Figure W) of his gym:

→Insert Figure W Here←

Abey: ... looking at this [[Points to Figure W]] just puts a smile on my face. This is home. ... [W]hen I walk in there’s music pumping. Guys are competing for machines. You hear weights smacking together. You can hear some guys grunting like buffalos, and some of them even smell like buffalos! All this adds to the atmosphere of a gym and a bodybuilder has to be very sensitive to that because it can really make or break your workouts.

Jarred: So, in your opinion what’s the best atmosphere for a bodybuilder to train?

Abey: Well for me it’s the kind [of atmosphere] that gives you that aggression to get through your training programme. There’re many times when you just want to give up. But a bodybuilder can’t be a pussy at gym. He has to push through every workout, every set, [and] every rep because that’s what guarantees the athlete good progress. And if you training in a place that doesn’t help give you that *oomph*, like that motivation and determination, then it’s going to be easy to just throw in the towel when it gets too tough.

During this photo-encounter, Abey vividly brought to the fore the ways in which he experiences his gym and values the ability of the gym space to shape the success of a competitive bodybuilder’s training programme. More than just a brick and mortar structure populated by human bodies and gym equipment; Abey describes his gym as a space which is affectively charged in ways that he likens to his “home”. For Abey, what appears to (e)merge through/with/across his gym is what he describes as a familiar and comforting quality that

saturates his material emplacement within the gym. Abey articulates this feeling as “the atmosphere of a gym” which, according to him, bodybuilders must be uniquely attentive to because of the way this atmosphere can “make or break your workouts”.

Interestingly, the “atmosphere” that Abey describes conceptually resembles the “affective atmospheres” which have been studied by scholars working at the intersection of affect theory and non-representational geography (Anderson, 2009; Ash, 2013; Buser, 2013). According to Anderson (2009) affective atmospheres “are a class of experience that occur *before* and *alongside* the formation of subjectivity, *across* human and non-human materialities, and *in-between* subject/object distinctions” (p. 78, emphasis original). In this sense, affective atmospheres are ontologically intra-active because they arise relationally from within and as a part of more-than↔human entanglements, and are not the possession of any single person, object, or place. To this effect, Anderson (2009) emphasises that affective atmospheres are also trans-corporeal in character, that is, they move and flow through/with/across the materialities of bodies, never floating-free from them, but, rather, (e)merge “from the assembling of ... human bodies, discursive bodies, non-human bodies, and all the other bodies that make up everyday situations” (p. 80).

According to Abey, the atmosphere of his gym is co-composed by multiple human and more-than-human agencies which co-participate through/with/across the gym space and, together, co-constitute a unique bricolage of sights, sounds, textures, and aromas which stimulate the sensory registers of his bodymind. The atmosphere that Abey experiences therefore becomes materially↔affectively tangible through/with/across the trans-corporeal relations between: music thundering from the gym’s stereo system; the presence of familiar faces; the hubbub of gym-goers jostling for the use of equipment; the sound of weights sharply clanging against one another; the buffalo-like snorts of men labouring under their weightlifting; and the musky stagnant smell of acrid sweat. This, for Abey, is the “visceral

landscape” (Sparkes & Smith, 2012, p. 171) of his gym, that is, a sight↔smell↔sound-scape of spatially peculiar sensuous↔sensual materialities that intra-actively work and affectively resonate through/with/across his bodymind as a bodybuilder.

However, going further, Abey highlights how the atmosphere which he considers most ideal for the intense muscle-building that a competitive bodybuilder must undertake within the gym space is also suffused with gendered discourses which materialise a sense of aggression. By contending that “a bodybuilder can’t be a pussy at gym”, Abey draws attention to the ways in which a lack of determination or, more pointedly, weakness, are subculturally constructed and gendered amongst bodybuilders, particularly when training within the gym space. Interestingly, in a study of how male wrestlers deployed the term “pussy” in constructing masculinity within competitive wrestling practices and spaces, Brian Fair (2011) found that the “epithet “pussy” functions as an all-encompassing trope for failed masculinity—the “pussy” is the feminine, passive, and implicitly penetrated “other,” set apart from normative masculinity” (p. 494, quotations original).

In a similar way, Abey contrasts the gendered trope of “pussy” with a more traditionally masculinised quality of toughness and perseverance which is both more subculturally valued and competitively valuable as a feature of a gym’s atmosphere for the male bodybuilder. Abey’s description demonstrates how the affective force of the gym space is therefore not only gendered, but, also, gendering of a male bodybuilder’s muscle-building practices within the gym. To this effect, Abey attests that it is a particularly masculinised atmosphere of aggression which performatively jolts his bodymind with what he refers to as the “motivation and determination” necessary to withstand the temptation of giving up. In doing so, Abey highlights how the gendered spatialities of a gym provide the competitive bodybuilder with the vital “oomph” that is, on one hand, physiologically necessary in enduring through the pain which initiates muscle accretion and, on the other hand,

subculturally important to the way the bodybuilding community discursively constructs the rigours of weight training, specifically, and physique development, more broadly.

Although Abey's account signifies how the more-than↔human relations of the gym space trans-corporeally co-participate through/with/across his bodymind in generating and, simultaneously, gendering an affective atmosphere conducive to the intense training sessions needed by a competitive bodybuilder. Interestingly, however, in a photo-encounter with Bevan, it was evident how such atmospheres also often became highly contested within some gyms. In one such instance, Bevan highlighted how his profuse perspiration was now part of an ongoing contestation over his gym etiquette:

→Insert Figure X Here←

Bevan: ... I have no choice because there's no gym just for bodybuilders in my area where I can go [train]. I have to use Planet Active¹⁹⁰. But it's a problem for me because I've had some run-ins with the [gym] manager.

Jarred: Oh, what's the problem?

Bevan: There are different rules, you know?

Jarred: Like?

Bevan: The [gym] manager at my place has been on me about this [[Picks up Figure X]]. Some people have been complaining about how much I sweat and that it's not hygienic or some shit. But hygiene is not the problem here [[Points to the pool of sweat on the workout bench in Figure X]]. The real problem is the people who go to Planet Active don't understand what the gym is for. Can you imagine if another bodybuilder saw me there and I haven't even cracked a sweat? He would wonder what's gone wrong. And how do you expect a guy not sweat at gym? That also wouldn't be natural. And do you know how many people I've seen sitting on this bench [[Gestures to Figure X]] having a fat fucking chat. And the women are the worst. They treat it like it's a fucking park bench. So, if I leave a little sweat there [[Gestures back to the pool sweat on the workout bench in Figure X]] it reminds them what it's for. The gym is for people who are here to train, you know? It's not a *chicks'* book club.

¹⁹⁰ "Planet Active" is a pseudonym for the gym Bevan trains at. This gym is the local branch of one of the largest chains of gym/fitness/wellness centres in South Africa.

In the above photo-encounter, Bevan references what has been widely lamented within the South African bodybuilding community as the demise of the dedicated bodybuilding gym. Today, as chains of more commercially viable gym/fitness/wellness-centers come to dominate the local market so too have many bodybuilders been forced to migrate into these more mainstream spaces. While not without its challenges for bodybuilders as well as other gym-goers, it is important to highlight that these challenges are not new or unique to South Africa. In 1993, Mansfield and McGinn had already observed that “[t]he ambience created by bodybuilding is not one which is valued by health clubs” (p. 51). More recently, Andrews et al. (2005) noted how bodybuilders’ imposing muscularities as well as the “specific codes of conduct, rituals and attitudes” (p. 889) which are a central part of their muscle-building practices, are typically unwelcome in more mainstream gyms.

In a similar way, Bevan highlights how attending the more mainstream Planet Active gym has posed significant challenges for him because of what he contends are, in his words, the “different rules”, that govern this gym space. In this regard, the key point of contestation that Bevan draws direct attention to in his autophotograph (See Figure X) is his sweat(ing/iness) or, more particularly, the way in which Bevan and his sweat(ing/iness) fail to comply with the generally accepted rules for sweat management at Planet Active.

In this regard, while the Western health/fitness/body-image revolution has made gym-going more mainstream and gyms a more common feature of middle-class and affluent urban and suburban communities (Crossley, 2006; Lavery & Wright, 2010); this has also been coupled with increased attention to class-informed values around the gym-goer’s vulnerability to bacterial infections that can be produced and dispersed within the gym space (See Cohen, 2008; Weissfeld, 2015). According to Weissfeld (2015), there exist a diverse biota of “infectious agents lurking at the gym” (p. 87) – a concern which has prompted many gyms to issue codes of hyper-sanitary conduct that require gym members to, for example, use

towels to soak up the regular spillages of sweat on gym equipment. In doing so, such rules of gym etiquette and cleanliness come to establish what Monaghan (2006) has astutely observed are the “fragile boundaries of social, cultural, moral, and corporeal order” (p. 171) which, in this instance, govern how human bodies, human bodily practices, and human bodily secretions are managed within the environment of a gym.

To this effect, Bevan acknowledges that when he fails to adequately manage his sweat by removing it from gym equipment, both he and his sweat(ing/iness) contravene the spatially peculiar values and practices which circumscribe hygiene at his Planet Active gym. Referring to the workout bench pictured in his autophotograph (See Figure X), Bevan recognises that his sweaty slick of perspiration intra-actively reproduces the workout bench and the spatial relations through/with/across it as tainted, in material↔discursive↔affective ways. In this regard, the sweaty bench becomes a source of questionable hygiene and, in so doing, a point of frustration for gym management because of the way it spatially repels other gym-goers away from it (Classen, Howes, & Synnott, 2003).

For Bevan, however, the pool of sweat which collects on the workout bench acts as a material reservoir affectively invested by two other spatially peculiar discursive tributaries, namely: (1) the material significance of sweat(ing/iness) for competitive male bodybuilders in the gym; and (2) the gendered significance of sweat(ing/iness) for males/men in the gym. First, it is clear that Bevan’s sentiments about sweat(ing/iness) within the gym space lean towards those similarly professed by Arnold Schwarzenegger (1998) when he described weight training in the gym as “tough and sweaty, not refined like an afternoon tea party” (p. 86). According to Waitt and Stanes (2015), sportsmen often regard sweat(ing/iness) as a potent affective force of “corporeal pride” (p. 33) because of the way it affirms “structural codes of the athletic body” (p. 33) by marking the expenditure of effort in the service of

competitive ambition. Similarly, for Bevan, his sweat(ing/iness) functions as a material marker, in particular, to other bodybuilders, which attests to his exertions within in the gym.

Secondly, the photo-encounter with Bevan also brings attention to how sweat(ing/iness) has a complex and contradictory relationship with the subjective and normative constructions of Western masculinity (Waite, 2014). On one hand, not perspiring during times of duress demonstrates a mastery typically resonant with masculine cool-headedness (Hustis, 2000; Pleck, 1976). On the other hand, evidence of perspiration can signify the masculine strength of men's physical labour (Hustis, 2000). For Bevan, his sweat(ing/iness) is discursively soaked with biologically rooted and spatially localised gendered/ing assumptions which naturalise the significant amounts of his sweat as part of male/masculine physicality within the gym space. In this regard, Bevan's rhetorical question "how do you expect a guy not to sweat at gym?", brings into sharp attention how "unnatural" it would be for him, as a biologically sexed male/man, not to perspire profusely.

Following this, Bevan juxtaposes his violation of the gym's hygiene rules to be offset by more significant infractions committed by other gym-goers, in particular, women. Of particular concern for Bevan is the way other gym-goers exhibit a poor understanding of the role and function of the gym by using, for example, the workout bench as platform to socialise. On this point, bodybuilders have been shown to exhibit some intolerance towards gym-goers who socialise in the gym (Andrews et al., 2005); often because socialising represents a violation of what bodybuilders typically envision to be the gym's sole and singular purpose: to be a space for onerous muscle-building (Coquet et al., 2016). Interestingly, Bevan corporealises the kind of socialising that he alleges transpires between such gym-goers as a definitively less muscular "fat fucking chat". For Bevan, social banter, which orientates around topics of concern other than weight training, transgressively transform/mogrify the workout bench into a "park bench" – an object whose material↔semiotic

presence within the gym space further invokes unacceptable connotations of leisure for Bevan. This behaviour, which flouts the subculturally accepted conduct for bodybuilders in the gym, remakes the affective spatialities of the gym into what Bevan characterises in explicitly gendered, feminised, and demeaning terms as a “chicks’ book club”.

It is, in seeming defence of the masculine sanctity and subcultural importance of the workout bench, specifically, and the gym space, more broadly, that Bevan appears to suggest that he deliberately deploys his sweat(ing/iness) as a materially gendered/ing salvo which attempts to trans-corporeally (re)mark and (re)make both the workout bench and the gym space as territories dedicated to the rigorous pursuit of muscle.

While the photo-encounter with Bevan and his autophotograph (See Figure X) of the sweaty bench illustrated how the affectively gendered relations of a more mainstream gym space can become hostile to a competitive male bodybuilder; it was Thabo’s discussion of the free weights section of his gym that further revealed how the affective relations of the gym are not fixed throughout the entire gym space, but, in fact, shift and change through/with/across spatially peculiar more-than↔human relations which are also deeply implicated in spatially localised gendered/ing power dynamics for competitive male bodybuilders, their muscle, and their muscle-building practices:

→Insert Figure Y Here←

Thabo: It can get annoying at the free weights [section] because of it being mainly guys who train here [[Gestures to Figure Y]]. Most come with that thing where they have to prove whose top dog. It’s really annoying

Jarred: How so?

Thabo: They’ll come in and grab the heaviest dumbbells there [[Points to the rack of dumbbells in Figure Y]]; but then they’ll lift [the dumbbells] with no technique. The difference with a bodybuilder is that he knows he can never sacrifice form. Even when there’s that temptation to lift something bigger. That’s when form can go out the window. I have to execute each rep so that the muscle gets the most value from the rep. Each rep must have perfect form; but most guys [who train in

this section of the gym] land up throwing weights around. Here [[Pointing to Figure Y]] I've got good control here ... this barbell's my bitch.

From the outset of this photo-encounter Thabo alludes to the way in which both the physical layout and socio-spatial relations of his gym appear organised around a distinct regionalisation of differently sexed/gendered bodies. In particular, Thabo highlights how the free weights section of his gym is not only largely populated by “guys”, that is, male gym-goers, but, owing to this, also becomes an affectively contested space for dominance amongst those males/men. In a similar vein, ethnographic research by Andrews et al. (2005), Bunsell (2010), Johansson (2013), as well as Lev and Hertzog (2017) has also observed that gym equipment and weights capable of substantial muscle-building are often geographically localised in parts of a gym typically dominated by male gym-goers; while lighter weights, aerobics machines, and body-toning/fat-loss apparatuses are corralled into Other(ed) areas, for the most part populated by women, older gym-goers, and men designated less masculine.

Although, at first, Thabo seemingly rebukes the gendered/ing power plays of this section of his gym by characterising them as “annoying”; he nonetheless goes on to employ gendered tropes which see a particularly masculinist style of dominance recuperated through the embodied relations he has with the weights in this section of his gym. In this regard, Thabo stresses how spatially significant his own demeanour, comportment, and performance are in identifying him as a bodybuilder when training in the free weights section of his gym. Here, Thabo's status as a bodybuilder becomes spatially circumscribed not just by the size of the weights he exercises with, but, also, by ensuring that he does not “sacrifice form” when exercising with the weights in this section of the gym.

Interestingly, at the same time, Thabo's embodied identity and practice as a bodybuilder also becomes spatially instantiated within the free weights section by resisting the enticing affective force “to lift something bigger”, namely, heavier weights. While

subculturally informed discourses around the disciplinary nature of competitive bodybuilding seemingly help Thabo to resist the “temptation” of lifting heavier weights, especially at the expense of his training technique being compromised; he characterises other male gym-goers as having succumbed to the beguiling allure that the heavier weights command in this section of his gym. In doing so, Thabo belittles these male gym-goers as no longer being seriously engaged in weight training, but, rather, fatuously “throwing weights around”.

Interestingly, Andrews et al. (2005) have found that when bodybuilders train in the gym they invest significant value in a demonstrable “physical capital, measured not only by their size and look, but [also] in terms of their ability to lift a certain amount of weight” (p. 883). Extending this insight further, Thabo highlights the importance that bodybuilders also place on form, that is, the corporeal technique or style of lifting weights. To this effect, Thabo suggests that it is not just the mass of the weights being lifted which determines their competitive value to his muscular development, but, rather, the degree to which he is able to execute what he calls a “perfect form” (or exercise technique) with those weights, in this specific weight training space.

For Thabo, “perfect form” not only appears to allude to the embodied knowledge and skill(s) that all bodybuilders should demonstrate when exercising with weights, but, at the same time, the assertion of an unquestionable level of control over the material agencies of those weights. In referencing his autophotograph (See Figure Y), Thabo emphasises the complete mastery he exhibits over the barbell he is seen lifting by materially corporealising what he describes as “good control” when executing each repetition. In doing so, the way in which Thabo discursively constructs and physically performs his weight lifting form becomes predicated on the maintenance of a hierarchical relationship between both himself and, in this instance, the barbell. It is through/with/across the spatially emplaced more-than↔human

muscle-building relations that define the Thabo↔barbell configuration, that Thabo also brings to bear a derogatory hetero-chauvinism in defining the barbell as his “bitch”.

In a sociological analysis of the word “bitch”, Kleinman, Ezzell, and Frost (2009) found that the phrase typically functions to express “dominance over a person or object” (p. 47), especially in light of its association to the debasement of women. Thus, by designating the barbell as his “bitch”, Thabo’s form not only discursively reproduces a humanocentric logic which feminises and simultaneously subordinates this non-human implement of muscle-building to his Hu/Man(ist) mastery, but, moreover, materially ingrains into his corporeal style of weight training the masculinist types of dominance and control that competitive male bodybuilders have been found to value in the gym space.

6.5. Gender-building more-than↔human muscle: A summary.

In this chapter I explored how the muscles of the competitive male bodybuilders participating in this study become gendered through the active co-participation of the material agencies of their muscle and their more-than-human world(s). Through trans-corporeality I traced how the gender(ed)-building of bodybuilders’ muscular bodies occurs through trans-corporeal relations which performatively (e)merge through/with/across the material agencies of their muscle and their more-than-human world(s). By analytically unspooling competitive male bodybuilders through/with/across such trans-corporeal relations an opportunity was presented to map the gendering of their bodies as a situated and relational process of material↔discursive↔affective intra-activity.

In the first section, I focussed analytical attention on the subculturally dominant competitive aesthetics of freakery, freakishness, and monstrosity amongst male bodybuilders. Here, I explored how muscular freakery and monstrosity are born from trans-corporeal relations “rich with multiple [more-than↔human] entanglements” (Barad, 2015, p. 393)

through/with/across subcultural discourses which aggrandise and mythologise the freak and monster aesthetic and, at the same time, subculturally situated affective connections which embed the drive for muscular freakishness and monstrosity within a masculinist rhetoric of hyper-competitiveness (Liokaftos, 2012). In the analysis presented, it was evidenced that the trans-corporeal relations which materially (re)produce muscular freakery and monstrosity are suffused with both more traditional as well as more radical gender(ed/ing) tropes. Thus, while the competitive aesthetic of freakishness and monstrosity often relies on overtly masculinist metaphors which often stabilise muscular freakishness and monstrosity as the product of the male bodybuilder's control, perseverance, and will; the competitive praxis of materially building freakish and monstrous amounts of muscle co-entail the "agencies of xenobiotic chemicals" (Alaimo, 2009a, p. 11) which are necessary in physiologically stimulating enhanced levels of muscle accretion.

In the second section, I moved to consider the recently introduced and increasingly popular classic aesthetic within men's competitive bodybuilding. Juxtaposed with what is often seen as the disproportionate size and overwhelming mass of the freak aesthetic; the classic bodybuilder is competitively defined by aesthetic-adjudicative criteria which require a "balanced, symmetrically developed physique" (BBSA, 2018c, p. 2). Channelling the visual aesthetic of Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*, the competitive project of men's classic bodybuilding distinguishes itself from the freak aesthetic by embedding physique development within a rhetoric and practice which, on one hand, devalues muscular size and delimits overall bodyweight and, on the other hand, emphasises the proportionality, shape, and definition of the male bodybuilder's physique (Mosesson, 2018). To this effect, the classic aesthetic becomes materially quantified through anthropometric formulas and competitive procedures which attempt to recuperate what is considered to be a more appealing size, form, and shape for the built muscularity of male bodybuilders. In doing so,

the muscular physique of the classic male bodybuilder becomes gendered through more-than↔human relations with both aesthetic criteria and anthropometric devices that transcorporeally (re)produce, in material↔discursive ways, the material measurements of what is constructed to be a more normatively gendered and therefore acceptable male/masculine/man's body within the bodybuilding subculture.

In the third section, I examined the matter race in the gender(ed)-building of male bodybuilders' muscle. According to Alaimo (2010a), race is not simply a "biological category, [but rather] forged within a history of economic and political oppression" (p. 61). Nowhere is this more evident than in the historical and contemporary life of South Africa where structural forms of anti-Black racism (and the legacies thereof) racialise the bodies of all South Africans, in particular, Black South Africans. The competitive bodybuilders in this study regularly employed discourses that reproduced their bodies and bodily practices in ways consonant with racialised forms of genetic essentialism. Genetically-inflected discourses not only underpinned how many of the participating bodybuilders came to understand the material physiology of their musculature (in racially specific ways), but, also, how they competitively built their musculature (again, in racially specific ways). Colonial and apartheid-era ideas on race blurred the boundaries between genetics, skin colour, and the corporeal size and shape of differently racialised biologically sexed male bodies. Discourses on race as well as sex/gender intersected in regulating how these South African male bodybuilders acknowledged and experienced the material force of their more-than-human world(s) through/with/across their muscle-building practices. For a White bodybuilder, the material agencies of the more-than-human world were considered negligible in crafting a body of competitive muscularity. However, for a Black bodybuilder, the racialised distribution of wealth in post-apartheid South Africa and, in particular, the uneven access that these bodybuilders have to financial support and sponsorship, (re)produced racially peculiar

“patterns of harm” (Alaimo, 2010a, p. 83) in the practices, resources, and environments through/with/across they competitively build muscle. For the competitive bodybuilders of this study, it was clear that the trans-corporeal relations which co-participate in gendering their muscle are, at the same time, racialised and racialising, especially through the ways that risk and harm to personal health in bodybuilding become racialised (as Black) and embedded through/with/across the materialities of more marginalised (namely, Black) male bodybuilders’ bodies and muscle.

In the fourth section, I turned to the gym. While the gym has long been acknowledged as an important site where male bodybuilders’ gendered identities and gendered bodies are physically built and subculturally moulded (Andrews et al., 2005); this literature has remained largely humanocentric through analytic frames of reference which continue to define the gym as a gendered “social space” (Johansson, 2013, para. 58). In doing so, much of the existing literature on the gym space has tended to focus on how human identities, human relations, and human actions become gendered within the social and bodily dynamics of the gym. Yet, from a trans-corporeal perspective, a new “relational approach to space” (Mulcahy, 2006, p. 58) and the materialities of that space became analytically possible. In (re)theorising the gym as a trans-corporeal space, I explored how the bodybuilders participating in this study developed deeply sensuous and sensual relations with both the human and more-than-human materialities of their gyms. These material relations not only worked to affectively (re)constitute the intense rigours of weight training within different areas of the gym space, but, also, the ways in which the building of muscle became discursively circumscribed by subculturally informed gendered/ing logics of both the gym and the practices of building muscle in the gym. In this regard, the gender(ed)-building of male bodybuilders’ muscle was seen to (e)merge intra-actively through/with/across more-than↔human relations with what were often spatially peculiar gendered power dynamics

un/enfolding through/with/across different areas of the gym, the material (human and more-than-human) bodies in and a part of those spaces, as well as the affective atmospheres (re)produced within and across those spaces. The gym is therefore not just a subculturally significant place in which muscle is built for competition, but, rather, a space of more-than↔human “lively emergence[s]” (Alaimo, 2008, p. 260) through/with/across which muscle becomes gendered.

In this chapter I demonstrated that through/with/across a trans-corporeal lens the “human body can never be [fully] disentangled from the material world” (Alaimo, 2010a, p. 24), even in the ways that bodies become gendered as well as racialised. To this effect, I have attempted to highlight that, in the world of men’s bodybuilding, both the science and art of competitively crafting the male bodybuilder’s body into a subculturally acceptable gendered form is never as deliberative, premeditated, or controlled (by the male bodybuilder) as subcultural lore would have one believe. Rather, the gender(ed)-building of male bodybuilders’ muscle appears to have “messy, multiple, material origins” (Alaimo, 2010a, p. 156) with/in the material↔discursive↔affective relations of their muscle-building practices.

In the following chapter, I provide a summary of this study’s principal findings and contributions; an overview of some of the key limitations in the methodological and analytical work of this study; and, in closing, a discussion of some of the potential directions for future research.

“My term “trans-corporeality” suggests that humans are inter-connected not only with one another but also with the material inter-changes between body, substance, and place. Trans-corporeality casts the human as posthuman, not as a historical progression, but as an assertion that ... we have never been human – if to be human begins with a separation from, or a disavowal of, the very stuff of the world.”

- Stacy Alaimo succinctly states what it means to challenge humanocentrism by retheorising a more-than↔human subject and body through/with/across trans-corporeality, in *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times* (2016a, p. 77, quotations original).

CHAPTER 7: MORE-THAN↔HUMAN BODYBUILDING

This study explored the trans-corporeal relations between South African competitive male bodybuilders and their more-than-human world(s). In doing so, this study sought to contest the humanocentric biases which recurrently appear in the subculture of men's competitive bodybuilding as well as existing scholarship on male bodybuilders, their muscle, and their muscle-building↔gendering practices. The aim of this chapter is to conclude this study in the four sections which follow.

In the first section, I provide a summary of the principal findings of this study. This is done in two parts. First, I focus on the contention that the muscle of competitive male bodybuilders is materially built through/with/across trans-corporeal relations which co-entail the material↔discursive↔affective agencies of their muscle and their more-than-human world(s). Following this, I focus on what a trans-corporeal rendering of competitive male bodybuilders, their muscle, and their muscle-building practices means for more fully understanding how their muscle becomes gendered for the competitive stage.

In the second section, I examine the primary contributions of this study. Here, I pay specific attention to the way in which the posthumanist approach of this study creatively extends existing literature on male bodybuilders, their bodies, and their more-than-human world(s), within the field of critical studies of bodybuilding/ers. Thereafter, I consider how this study connects to furthering the conceptual development of sex, gender, materiality, and discourse, particularly for theorisations of male/masculine/men's bodies within (pro)feminist critical studies of men and masculinity/ies.

In the third section, I examine some of the challenges and limitations of this study. In doing so, I not only consider practical challenges which influenced the methodological work of this study, but, also, analytical limitations in the approach and focus of the study.

Finally, in the fourth section, I highlight future directions for the work and findings of this study. At first, I examine how the work of this study could be broadened by applying trans-corporeality to critical studies of bodybuilding which consider other dimensions and specificities of bodybuilders' subjectivity and embodiment. In addition to this, I explore how the findings of this study point to the need for a much more concerted degree of critical scholarly work on the matter/material/materiality of South African men's bodies.

7.1. Trans-corporeal bodybuilding: A summary of the principal findings.

This feminist-inflected posthumanist and post-qualitative study explored how the trans-corporeal relations between 30 South African competitive male bodybuilders and their more-than-human world(s) work in *materialising* and, at the same time, *gendering*, their muscle for participation on the competitive stage. In outlining the principal findings of this study, it is important to reiterate that I do not consider the ways muscle materialises and how it becomes gendered to be mutually exclusive processes. However, for the purpose of clarity, I will first focus on the dimensions of this study which concentrated on the materialisation of the participating bodybuilders' muscle (as covered in Chapter Five) and, thereafter, focus on the gendering of their muscle (as covered in Chapter Six). In doing so, I provide a summary of how the muscle of competitive male bodybuilders participating in this study became (1) materially built and (2) gendered through/with/across the intra-active and trans-corporeal co-participation of multiple more-than↔human and material↔discursive↔affective agencies.

7.1.1. Muscle matters: Bodybuilding more-than↔human muscle.

In this study I found that the materiality of competitive male bodybuilders' muscle becomes materially co-constituted through/with/across trans-corporeal relations with their more-than-human world(s).

In exploring how the subculturally peculiar muscle-building practices of the competitive male bodybuilders participating in this study intra-actively co-produce their muscle in ways which render it always already more-than↔human muscle; it was necessary to begin by undercutting the ways in which Western, humanocentric, and patriarchal tropes as well as narcissistic and Cartesianesque rhetoric and practice within the competitive bodybuilding subculture ultimately endeavour to construct the male bodybuilder as a bifurcated subject: on one hand, with an active and superior mind detached from a passive and objectified body; and, on the other hand, with a corporeal body disconnected from a material world of inert and inactive objects, substances, and places to be regarded as mere resources for muscular development. Thus, as a point of departure, this study set about exploring the ways in which building muscle becomes a wholly embodied praxis which affectively produces a deeply immersive and ideal “zone” for weight training. In this regard, the findings of this study suggest that “the zone” marks the materialisation of an intensely interconnected state between the bodybuilder’s mind and body while in training. In doing so, “the zone” co-produces a wholly embodied musclemind characterised by a concerted degree of trans-corporeal attunement to the peculiar and evolving sensual experiences of their musculature as well as their gym equipment, when engaged in training.

In taking this further, this study also moved to trans-corporeally transform/figure/mogrify bodybuilders’ skin from what is usually considered either a textualised surface on which the discursive regimes of bodybuilding are written (Mansfield & McGinn, 1993) or an inert surface which simply needs to be competitively prepared in ways which maximise the appearance of the true focus of bodybuilding, that is, the muscle which lies under it. In contrast to this, this study found bodybuilders’ skin to be a lively substance of trans-corporeal exchange whose material organicities dynamically co-participated with a number of more-than-human materialities, such as, bronzing cream, in the competitive

practices of preparing a bodybuilder's physique for the aesthetic and adjudicative challenges of the competitive stage.

This study also explored the core competitive practices that competitive bodybuilders pursue in materially building muscle, namely: dieting and nutritional supplementation; steroid use; and weight training. Through/with/across these competitive practices the more-than-human agencies of food, steroids, and gym equipment performatively work in materialising the competition-ready "peaked physique" that every competitive male bodybuilder needs to present on stage. With that said, the findings of this study highlight that these nutritional, chemical, and material agencies do not always co-participate in building muscle in ways that a competitive bodybuilder desires or plans: some foods slowdown metabolisms; some steroids cause infections (or worse); and gym equipment sometimes provokes injury. What this therefore suggests, is that the subcultural narrative that success in competitive bodybuilding is determined by a bodybuilder's will, perseverance, or commitment to trans-forming/mogrifying their body through the pain, sacrifice, and risks entailed in modern day bodybuilding is in fact, a humanocentric falsehood, if not a narcissistic fallacy. It is, in this regard, that the findings of this study suggest that a bodybuilder's competitive success (at least in building muscle) lives or dies with/in the intra-active and trans-corporeal relations which unfold between their bodies and their more-than-human world(s).

Lastly, this study examined the material agency and force of time in how bodybuilders competitively build their muscle. More than just a passive backdrop of years, months, weeks, days, and hours which mark the painstaking and painful (re)shaping of their musculature; this study found that time becomes trans-corporeally enfolded through/with/across bodybuilders' muscle. In the time(s) spent building muscle, time is not just an external parameter to a bodybuilder's muscle-building practices; rather, the time(s) of

building muscle become-with/in the material qualities of their muscle, that is to say, cultivating competitively advantageous qualities of hardness, thickness, density, and definition.

7.1.2. Gender (and race) matters: Gender-building more-than↔human muscle.

In this study I found that competitive male bodybuilders' muscle becomes gendered in subculturally peculiar ways through/with/across the trans-corporeal relations which materially build and prepare it for the competitive stage.

In studying modern day competitive bodybuilding for men, it is impossible to avoid the subcultural dominance of the competitive aesthetics of freakery, freakishness, and monstrosity. While previous studies have concluded that the freak aesthetic amongst competitive male bodybuilders represents a discursive effect of the hyper-competitive and hyper-masculine features of the bodybuilding subculture (Klein, 1993a; Wiegers, 1998); other studies have also pointed to how the hyper-developed and hyper-defined musculature of the freak aesthetic renders the male bodybuilder an almost Queer figuration (Richardson, 2004; Schippert, 2007). In contrast to this, the findings of this study suggest that the freak aesthetic weaves together both more hyper-masculinist and, at the same time, more Queer discourses of gender. In doing so, freakish forms of muscularity reiterate hyperbolised tropes of masculinity while also making the corporeal embodiment of gendered and masculine norms more subculturally pliable for male bodybuilders. What is however clear is that the competitive practices of building freakish levels of muscle always co-entail the more-than-human world – this is a body whose material growth and muscle accretion is fed and fuelled by the significant use of AASs and PPEs, the rapacious consumption of food, and excessive amounts of weight training and exercise. To this effect, the findings of this study reveal how freakish physiques are not so much materially gendered in ways completely self-determined

by competitive bodybuilders or their competitively determined aesthetic-adjudicative criteria, but, rather, through/with/across trans-corporeal relations with more-than-human agencies which also often co-produce material malformations of their flesh, such as, “bitch tits”, which break both subjectively and subculturally gendered expectations for the bodies of competitive male bodybuilders.

In contrast to the overwhelming size, mass, and definition of the freak aesthetic, this study also explored the growing popularity of men’s classic bodybuilding and, with this, the so-called classic aesthetic. While online bodybuilding forums and pundits have heralded the imminent death of men’s (open division) bodybuilding and its replacement by competitive forms of bodybuilding which place emphasis on much leaner musculatures and far less massive physiques (Hill, 2017); there has been surprisingly little academic analysis of classic bodybuilding. The findings of this study suggest that the classic aesthetic represents an effort within organised competitive bodybuilding to rebuild more commercially viable forms of men’s bodybuilding which extend beyond the aesthetic tastes of the bodybuilding subculture and its immediate acolytes. In doing so, the classic physique is explicitly made in (what at least bodybuilders consider to be) more normatively gendered ways through a particularly unique set of aesthetic-adjudicative criteria which discursively circumscribe the material bounds of muscular development. In this regard, classic bodybuilding brings to bear anthropometric formulas, devices, and measurements which trans-corporeally (re)mould more masculine and more palatable masses and portions of muscle for the body of the classic male bodybuilder.

In exploring how the muscle for competitive male bodybuilders becomes competitively gendered for competition, this study also examined how contextually peculiar discourses, understandings, and experiences of race in South Africa, also become co-implicated in the gender(ed)-building of South African male bodybuilders muscle. According

to Pamela Moore (1997), although race has long been acknowledged to be “tightly ... tied to physical existence, it is oddly overlooked ... in academic discussions of bodybuilding, a sport rife with racial disharmony” (p. 3). Race has been, and continues to be, the most significant axis along which South Africa is culturally, politically, and economically organised. In South Africa, a long history of colonialism and apartheid, as well as the vastly unequal distribution of wealth post-apartheid, has come to mean that a South African’s structural position as well as their relative experience of privilege or deprivation is very much circumscribed, most significantly, by their race. In this regard, the findings of this study suggest that competitive male bodybuilders from the historically constructed racial identity categories of South Africa, namely, Black, White, Coloured, and Indian, understand both their own and other bodybuilders’ (gendered) musculature in racially specific and often prejudicial ways. But, more than just that, this study also highlights how South African competitive male bodybuilders not only build their muscle in racially specific ways, but, at the same time, are subjected to uneven and classed patterns of physical risk and harm when building muscle, by virtue of their race. To this effect, the findings of this study bring to very tangible attention the ways that race (e)merges through/with/across geographically situated and emplaced trans-corporeal relations co-constituted by the more immediate and much broader “intra-action of history, culture, economics, and material human bodies” (Hames-Garcia, 2007, p. 331).

Lastly, in considering the influence of place and space more specifically on the gender(ed)-building of competitive male bodybuilders’ muscle, this study turned to the premier place in which bodybuilders build muscle: the gym. In doing so, rather than just focussing on the gendered “sociality of muscle” (Andreasson & Johansson, 2019, p. 77) within the subcultural rhetoric and relations amongst bodybuilders (and other gym-goers) within the gym space; this study opted to explore how the trans-corporeal relations between competitive male bodybuilders and the material agencies and spatialities of the gym came to

co-participate in the gender(ed)-building of their muscle. For the competitive male bodybuilders of this study, the gym was often imbued with the kind of gendered affective atmosphere which resonated with the intense and rigorous project of building muscle. However, while the gym was the primary place which provided the weights and equipment necessary to build competition worthy levels of muscularity; the gym was also a space which required the fraught and skilful negotiation of subculturally informed gender(ed/ing) dynamics and power relations co-produced through/with/across ever-changing hives of intra-activity between both the human and more-than-human bodies that inhabited the gym.

7.2. Breaking borders: The primary contributions of this study.

In a time where talk of borders, walls, and border-walls appears to be consuming much of the (Western) world; working with trans-corporeality is never simply just about working with the corporeal, the material, or the more-than-human. It is much more than that. Working with/in trans-corporeality is about blurring boundaries (Alaimo, 2009b). It is about transgressively trans-forming/mogrifying/figuring that which we (humans) have come to conventionally identify as “human” and “non-human”, as “matter” and “discourse”, and as “mind” and “body”. Working with trans-corporeality is, therefore, not an act of working with somebody or something in particular, but, rather, a working through/with/across and between these “bodies” and “things” to explore the relations through which they become, together.

If working with trans-corporeality is, as I have come to experience through this study, a contestation of the borderological fetishism that typically marks human thought; then the critical contribution of working with trans-corporeality is to move toward undoing the mutually reinforcing anthro/andro/Euro-centric orthodoxies that typically underpin the conceptual and material borders of humanocentric thought and culture. In what follows I examine the primary contributions of the work and findings of this study for: (1) critical

studies of bodybuilding/ers and, in particular, understanding competitive male bodybuilders, their bodies, and their bodybuilding practices in more expansive and more-than↔human ways; and (2) the field of (pro)feminist critical studies of men and masculinity/ies (CSMM) and, in particular, the ongoing conceptual development of sex, gender, materiality, and discourse in theorisations of male/masculine/men's bodies.

7.2.1. For critical studies of bodybuilding/ers: The promise of a posthumanist approach.

I would contend that this study makes a novel contribution to the existing social scientific literature and critical commentary on competitive male bodybuilders. As an alternative to the longstanding psychologicistic and subcultural studies which have in both explicit and implicit ways restated the analytical centrality and agency of the competitive male bodybuilder within their subculturally peculiar muscle-building↔gendering practices; this study has attempted to craft a radically new trans-corporeal perspective through which subcultural and academically reproduced humanocentric biases are no longer taken for granted.

The intention of this study was not to further flesh-out the gendered anxieties, psychological inadequacies, or identity projects supposedly at stake for competitive male bodybuilders as they materially (re)build and (re)shape their muscle; since this has already been done to great effect by the existing body of work on bodybuilding/ers. Rather, this study sought to go further into the matter of their flesh and, in so doing, extend the insights of those fleshier paradigms of bodybuilding which have more recently provided some necessary material ballast to scholarly work on male bodybuilders' bodies and, in particular, their muscle.

However, in aligning with fleshier paradigms of bodybuilding, my goal was not to negate the insights provided by the broad base of psychologicistic, medicalised, phenomenological, postmodernist, or subcultural work on bodybuilders, but, in fact, to move

towards a more capacious analytic through which these dynamics and influences could be seen as intra-actively co-participating through/with/across the material agencies, discursive forces, and affective relations of bodybuilders' very own bodies and their more-than-human world(s). In saying this, I too recognise that "it is not enough to appeal [solely] to the more-than-human or materiality" (Jackson, 2018, p. xi) – for this would fall into the very same analytical trap which I suggest much of the existing scholarship on competitive male bodybuilders has fallen: the deep-seated logic of Western binarism(s) which underwrites how humanocentric, Cartesian, and patriarchal systems of logic not only bifurcate the human and the more-than-human, discourse and matter, mind and body, but, at the same time, cast the latter of these pairings to the periphery while the former remains of central concern as well as higher cultural and academic value (Haraway, 1991).

The future of critical studies of bodybuilding/ers will need, as Moore (1997) has said: "new paradigms – paradigms which refuse the easy settlement of binary contradictions and open the playing field of body studies" (p. 3). It is, in this regard, that I consider a trans-corporeal rendering of competitive male bodybuilders, their muscle, and their muscle-building↔gendering practices to bear the most promise for critical studies of bodybuilding/ers, because of the way such an analysis sets the stage for a feminist-inflected posthumanist trajectory of scholarly work which ultimately entails "the refusal of ... binary thinking, ... and the dialectics of otherness that underscores it" (Braidotti, 2016b, p. 25).

7.2.2. For critical studies of men and masculinity/ies: The theoretical development of male/masculine/men's bodies.

As a study which focusses on developing a feminist posthumanist account of competitive male bodybuilders, their muscle, and their muscle-building↔gendering practices, it is important to recognise how this study ultimately places men, men's bodies, and men's bodily

practices under critical scrutiny. To this effect, it would be ill-conceived to not consider the value that this study has for (pro)feminist CSMM and, in particular, the analytical development of men's bodies.

Although CSMM have, over the past four decades, been at the forefront of developing a broad base of "historical, cultural, relational, materialist, deconstructive, and antessentialist" (Pringle, Hearn, Pease, & Ruspini, 2011, p. 2) literature on men, masculinity/ies, and men's practices (Connell, Hearn, & Kimmel, 2005); the subject of men's bodies, generally, and men's bodily materiality, more specifically, has often proven to be a path of theorising paved with the conceptual quicksand of patriarchal Western thought and its Cartesian and humanocentric legacies within the social sciences (Lloyd, 1984). Even, from the mid-1980s, when the first so-called "turn to the body" by the likes of Featherstone (1982) and Turner (1984) inaugurated new sociologies of "the body" (Crossley, 1995; Featherstone, Hepworth & Turner, 1991; Frank, 1990, 1991; O'Neill, 1985; Scott & Morgan, 1993; Shilling, 1993; Williams & Bendelow, 1998); critical engagement with bodies explicitly named and gendered as *men's bodies* were, for the most part, "limited and disappointing"¹⁹¹ (Morgan, 1993, p. 71). So "absent"¹⁹² were men's bodies from social scientific enquiry at the time that Coward (1985) even declared men's bodies to be "the true "dark continent" of ... society"¹⁹³ (p. 227, quotations original).

For Liz Grosz (1994), the analytical (in)visibility of men's bodies has always been an effect of the historical modelling of biological sexual difference through the Cartesian separation of mind/body that (hierarchically) couples males/masculinity/men with mind/rationality and, therefore, signifies them as less corporeally bound in and to the

¹⁹¹ The earliest notable exceptions to this were in the work of Dyer (1982) and Connell (1983).

¹⁹² This is not to say that male/men's bodies never appeared within academic study or popular discourse, but, rather, to emphasise, as MacMullan (2002) does, that male/men's bodies did not appear "as a male body *qua* male, but as a male body *qua* universal" (p. 2, emphasis original).

¹⁹³ Especially when compared to the longstanding focus on female/women's bodies in academic and activist feminism(s).

materiality of their bodies. However, with the growth and expansion of CSMM through the 1990s and 2000s, men's bodies did begin to receive increasingly more attention as part of a growing set of focal areas in masculinity/ies research, including, but not limited to: sport (Messner, 1990); work (Acker, 1990); religion (Krondorfer, 1996); criminality (Collier, 1998); sex (Bordo, 1999); violence (Messerschmidt, 1999); health and illness (Watson, 2000); body modification (Luciano, 2001); the media (MacKinnon, 2003); consumer culture (Beynon, 2004); war (Jarvis, 2004); body image (Cafri & Thompson, 2004); technology (Mellström, 2004); relationships (Seidler, 2006); and politics (Messner, 2007).

While the qualitative and quantitative growth in scholarship on men's bodies may have proved important in explicitly identifying their bodies as a site for critical attention (Tuana, Cowling, Hamington, Johnson, & MacMullan, 2002); much of this work has continued to present with difficulties in theorising "the materiality of men's bodies and its conceptual relationship to masculinity and masculine subjectivity" (Anemtoice, 2014, p. 37). According to Jeff Hearn (2012a), the theoretical development of men's bodies and, with this, their bodily corpo-materialities, has largely come to be characterised by the broader paradigmatic shifts within CSMM, such as: (1) the move from biogenic to sociogenic accounts of masculinity, as part of the conceptual breaking off of gender(/culture/mind) from sex(/biology/body); (2) the rise of social constructionism and the turn to practice-based and pluralised theories of gender and masculine embodiment; and (3) the emergence of poststructuralist, discursive, and deconstructionist critiques of the sex/gender binary. However, while the dominant approach to theorising men's bodies has evolved towards more social (Connell, 1995) and discursive (Beasley, 2005, 2012; Petersen, 1998) forms of constructionism; the theoretical development of men's bodily materiality within CSMM has often been dogged by what Garlick (2016) calls an abiding "[f]aith in distinctions" (p. 4) in

which the conceptual boundaries between biology/culture, sex/gender, matter/discourse, structure/agency, mind/body, and body/society have been recurrently redrawn and reiterated.

It is, in this regard, that Hearn (2012a) has pointed to the analytically productive possibilities of approaches which are “post-constructionist” (p. 307) in their theoretical orientation. Based on Nina Lykke’s (2010a) work on a feminist post-constructionism which endeavours to theorise “bodily and transcorporeal materialities in ways that neither push feminist thought back into the traps of biological determinism or cultural essentialism, nor make feminist theorizing leave bodily matter and biologies “behind” in a critically under-theorized limbo” (pp. 131-132, quotations original); Hearn (2012b), contends that a post-constructionist approach facilitates more complex theories of males/masculinities/men as “a non-essential social category ... not a matter of biological sex or cultural gender, but the ‘post-construction’ of embodied material-discursive gender/sex, or simply ‘gex’ ” (p. 161, quotations original). To this effect, Hearn (2015) has argued that such an approach allows for male/masculine/men’s bodies to be reformulated “in terms of combinations” (p. 7), or, in other words, in ways which are “both more materialist and more discursive, that is, material-discursive, materialsemiotic or material-discursive” (Hearn & Hein, 2015, p. 1639).

It is, in this regard, that Hearn’s (2015) material-discursive theorisation of male/masculine/men’s bodies not only recognises that “[g]ender and sex are not separable from bodily matter” (p. 7), but, moreover, that the processes through/with/across which male/masculine/men’s bodily materiality becomes sexed/gendered/gexed are “social and constructed, [but] partly through human/non-human ... interactions” (p. 7). In doing so, the work of this study provides an empirical example of how a post-constructionist outlook would analytically render male/masculine/men’s bodies.

Through feminist posthumanist and post-constructionist modes of theorising, such as, trans-corporeality, it becomes possible to render men in far more relational, interconnected,

and less humanocentric ontologies which treat the materiality of their bodies as “an intensive and intensified site, formed and extending in ... relations to others, environments, places and spaces” (Hearn, 2015, p. 105). The theoretical and political implications for such an approach could not be more important. According to Mellström (2016), progressively rethinking males/masculine/men’s bodies in more-than↔human ways foregrounds a new “ontological politics of vulnerability and intimacy” (para. 2) for males/masculinities/men. At the heart of such a project lies a feminist-inflected effort to displace the “dominator relationship” (Pease, 2016, p. 25) that has historically marked (White) Western Man’s control, consumption, and exploitation of both human and non-human Others, with a new framework for gendered subjectivity which is founded on ethical allegiances of coexistence, mutuality, solidarity, coalition, and sustainability with the non-human world, as well as with those who have been traditionally deemed less-than-(Hu/)Man¹⁹⁴.

7.3. Some challenges and limitations of this study.

While no research is without challenges and limitations, the task of all researchers is not just to acknowledge potential limitations, but, also, to account for how these limitations are negotiated throughout the research process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). In this spirit, I now examine some of the practical challenges posed by having to methodologically negotiate my own humanocentric biases with the posthumanist aims of this study while, at the same time, not neglecting critical dimensions of the human participants’ subjectivities and experiences. Thereafter, I look at the analytical limitations in this study’s focus on the matter/material/materiality of competitive male bodybuilders’ muscle.

¹⁹⁴ In particular, women, animals, the poor/homeless/landless, Queer, Black, disabled, elderly and infirm, as well as, more broadly, the global South and East.

7.3.1. Methodological challenges: Resisting humanocentrism while not ironing out human experiences of marginalisation and deprivation.

According to Strom, Mills, and Ovens (2018), posthumanist and post-qualitative research “entails the explicit displacement of the humanist/anthropocentric “I,” as well as ... a move away from focussing on bounded individuals and towards connected, shifting multiplicities” (p. 4, quotations original). It is however, in this regard, that posthumanist and post-qualitative studies are a challenge – in both senses of the word: while, on the one hand, posthumanist research practices provide an important challenge to the institutional(ised) sanctity of “the human” within social science research and, with this, those Western, patriarchal, and Cartesian systems of knowledge production which are linked to the institutional reproduction of the Hu/Man(ist) subject (Taylor, 2016); it is this very challenge that, on the other hand, often makes posthumanist research challenging to do because of the way it forces the researcher to confront “habitual human-centric ways of seeing” (Merewether, 2019, p. 105).

Throughout this study I often struggled to resist an anthropocentric pull towards the human participants of this research, especially in their autophotographic work. It is difficult to do academic work with competitive bodybuilders without paying significant attention to the visual appearance of their bodies – for this is, in many ways, the entire enterprise of bodybuilding: it is a visual spectacle of the human body (Dutton, 1995). The size, proportion, definition, and density of the male bodybuilder’s muscularly moulded physique (whether one finds this attractive or repulsive) remains unapologetically there; it is a body which, to paraphrase Connell (1983), distinctly occupies space through its palpable material presence in the world, often making it difficult to see anything (or anyone) else.

Interestingly, this challenge has appeared to be a common one faced by posthumanist researchers, especially those engaging the use of visual research methods. In Hultman and Lenz Taguchi’s (2010) photographic research with children, the researchers noted: “The

children in the [photographic] images seemed to have a magnetic power over our gazes: they stood out from the background and seemed to rise above the material environment ... [while] all other non-human matter visible in the photographs seemed inactive, and in our eyes, merely the backdrop for these children's actions and competences" (p. 525).

In resisting the ingrained humanocentric biases within my own perceptual system, new more trans-corporeal ways of (re)looking at bodybuilders' autophotographic work were required. Practically this usually meant star(t)ing at the edge(s) of photographic images as a way of noting all the peripheral objects, technologies, and substances which typically tended to orbit around the often central(ised) figure of the human bodybuilder – as opposed to using the bodybuilder or their body as the visual anchoring point for the multiple material agencies at work in their photographs. In addition to this, I would also look at participants' autophotographs while, at same time, listening to our audio-recorded photo-encounter sessions as a way of generating a less ocularcentric and more multi-sensory, embodied, and affectively attuned engagement through/with/across the autophotographic material.

Although "breaking entrenched anthropocentric and taken-for-granted ways of seeing" (Merewether, 2019, p. 105) proved a recurrent challenge in the methodo-analytical work of this study; I also found it challenging to ensure that the posthumanist approach pursued in this research did not in some way diminish the human participants of this study. In one particular instance, this concern was brought to my attention when I presented some of the earlier findings of this study at a national research conference for South African psychologists (Martin, 2017b). At the end of my presentation, during the question-and-answer portion of the event, an audience member stood to criticise the way a posthumanist approach appeared inappropriate within South African social science because of the potential it had to, in his words, "iron out" human experience – which would be particularly problematic given South Africa's long history of denying those humans who were designated

by the colonial and apartheid governments as “non-White” the full rights and legal status of being human, up until as recent as twenty-five years ago.

While the emergence of posthumanist work has prompted debate about the analytical utility of peculiarly human categories of identity, such as, for example, “race” (Jackson, 2013) and “gender” (Gherardi, 2018); Rosi Braidotti (2018) has argued that posthumanism “does not automatically point to the end of the [human] species, let alone to the end of gender/sexuality/class/race/age, etc. power relations between members of the [human] species. The posthuman rather offers a spectrum through which we can capture the [more-than↔human] complexity of ongoing processes of subject-formation” (p. xix). In this regard, it is not surprising that an emerging group of South African social science scholars have begun to feed explicitly feminist and decolonial forms of critical posthumanist theorising into anti-patriarchal and anti-racist modes of social justice research (Bozalek, Braidotti, Shefer, & Zembylas, 2018; Hudson, 2018; Murris, 2016).

To this effect, the concerns raised with me by the above-mentioned conference attendee factored as an important reminder to ensure that those competitive male bodybuilders coming from historically marginalised and structurally disadvantaged communities did not have the specificities of their subjectivities or structural circumstances denied, negated, or diminished. In fact, it prompted a much more concerted effort in the methodological work of this study to explore how both the material and discursive situated experiences of marginalisation as well as the subjective and structural legacies of apartheid continue to be reproduced in South African competitive bodybuilding as well as the bodies and muscle of South African male bodybuilders of different races who live with and experience different degrees of structural and material privilege and deprivation.

7.3.2. Analytical limitations: Bodybuilding more-than-muscle.

While the focus of this study primarily sought to explore how male bodybuilders' muscle was materially built and gendered for competition; it would be disingenuous to create the impression that competitive bodybuilding is only about muscle. There is a lot more to competitive male bodybuilders and the practices of bodybuilding than just muscular development. As male bodybuilders competitively craft their bodies into solid slabs of flesh, many other bodily tissues and fluids become co-implicated in their physical development. Probably the most significant of these is adipose tissue or subcutaneous bodyfat.

In many ways, the loss of bodyfat is just as important to the competitive bodybuilder as the accretion of muscle mass is (Bolin, 1997); since it is only through the depletion of bodyfat tissue that the competitive bodybuilder is able to visibly display their striated musculature and vascularity and, with this, enhance the appearance of a hard and well-defined physique which meets the aesthetic-adjudicative criteria of men's bodybuilding (Schwarzenegger & Hall, 1977). In this regard, the matter/material/materiality of bodyfat becomes most pronounced when a bodybuilder enters the cutting phase of their competitive diet as they attempt to lose fat while, at the same time, attempting to prevent "the loss of precious muscle" (Bolin, 1997, p. 192).

Heeding Moore's (1997) call for more "[f]leshy paradigms" (p. 3) within critical studies of bodybuilding/ers will necessitate theoretical and methodological work which does not analytically (de)limit and thereby reduce bodybuilders, their bodies, and their bodybuilding practices, to muscle. Rather, what is required is an approach which empirically builds bodybuilders in corporeally fuller ways that, in so doing, accounts for the multifarious corpo-materialities which co-participate in the fleshy formation of their competitive physiques.

Although not the focal point of this study, it was often hard to ignore the material agencies of corpo-materialities other-than-muscle. For the bodybuilders that participated in this study, their autophotographic work and our photo-encounter sessions were punctuated by stories of competitive muscle-building practices that also co-entailed: their bones fracturing through the repetitive stress of weightlifting; their tendons bursting and ligaments tearing under the weight of overloaded gym equipment; and their vital organs beginning to fail as a result of the untold toxic effect of years of AAS and PPE use. In this regard, many of the bodybuilders in this study had had their competitive careers and personal lives temporarily or permanently altered by bodily materialities other-than-muscle.

To this effect, it is worth mentioning that while the use of autophotographic methods most certainly enhanced the ability of this study to evocatively illustrate how the trans-corporeal relations between competitive male bodybuilders and their more-than-human world(s) co-participate in materially building and gendering their muscle; it is likely that this largely visual research method could have been adapted in far more multi-sensory ways to allow the fullness of bodybuilders' (trans-)corporeal changes to come to light. An example of this could have been the combined use of autophotographic contributions with anthropometric measurements of the participating bodybuilders over the course of the study. At the start of this study all the participating male bodybuilders were at different points of preparation and readiness for the competitive stage and, as the study progressed, their bodies were trans-formed/mogrified in inescapably material ways. It is quite likely that the embodied and sensual dimensions of this study could have been extended beyond muscle by including photographic or videographic contributions of these changes over the time of this

research and, with this, the concomitant changes in the anthropometric measurements of the participating bodybuilders' bodies¹⁹⁵.

By developing competitive male bodybuilders in a way which analytically renders them as always already more-than-muscle, “more sophisticated ways of analysing embodied subjectivity” (Chadwick, 2012, p. 134) become possible. In doing so, this helps to more fully understand how particular kinds of bodily matter/material/materialities play a peculiar role in the gendering of male bodybuilders' bodies, and, moreover, how particular sensualities, visceral experiences, and more-than↔human relations become peculiarly linked with the building and gendering of different corpo-materialities in men's competitive bodybuilding. Such an effort would also carry with it important (pro)feminist implications for the critical study of male bodybuilders by undoing the historical association of men and men's bodies with muscle and, by extension, phallogentric and patriarchal tropes of hardness and strength.

7.4. (In)conclusion: Future directions for the work and findings of this study.

Part of the excitement (and terror) of embarking on a posthumanist and post-qualitative study is the way in which the thinking↔feeling↔doing of such a study becomes unmoored from the “conventional humanist qualitative research process” (St. Pierre, 2014, p. 3). In doing so, post-qualitative research encourages a research practice that productively and creatively disrupts the traditionally spatialised temporal stages of a research project which begins in the institutionally controlled processes of research design and terminates with the output of an institutionally acceptable research product, such as, a doctoral dissertation. In this regard, it is not unusual, at least within the conventional logic of a qualitative research methodology, that

¹⁹⁵ This request of competitive bodybuilders would not necessarily be unusual since many of them are already in the habit of taking “progression pictures”, that is, weekly photographs of the changes in their physiques in the lead up to a competition.

a “conclusion is conventionally (and often conveniently) the end or finish of a given task, event, or process” (Higgins, 2017, p. 91).

Rather than the end(ing) of a research project and, with this, the present(ing) of a new research project; the completion of a post-qualitative study is not a space-time/time-space of methodological conclusion and analytical closure, but, rather, a spacetime-mattering of (in)conclusion as part of which the work of this study “is always already threaded through with anticipation of where it is going but will never simply reach and of a past that has yet to come” (Barad, 2010, p. 244). In the subsections which follow, I consider some potential directions and possible futures for the work and findings of this study for: (1) critical studies of competitive male bodybuilders; and (2) critical studies of South African men’s bodies.

7.4.1. For critical studies of bodybuilding/ers: Bodybuilding more-than-gender.

In recent years, increasingly more social scientists have become concerned with rendering critical accounts of human subjectivity and embodiment in ways which are attentive to the complex, overlapping, and multi-dimensional bases of human identity and human experience (Shields, 2008). Nowhere has this been more apparent than in the growing use of the concept of *intersectionality* as a way of expanding how to understand “the interlocking effects of race, class, gender, and sexuality, highlighting the ways in which categories of identity and structure of inequality are mutually constituted and defy separation into discrete categories of analysis” (Thornton Dill & Kohlman, 2012, p. 154).

However, within critical studies of men’s bodybuilding, sex/gender continue to be the primary aspect of subjectivity which recurrently comes under academic scrutiny. While this is perhaps understandable given the ways in which dichotomous constructions of sex/gender exist within the bodybuilding subculture and, with this, structure almost every dimension of the competitive community (Ian, 2001); this has meant other dimensions of subjectivity, such

as, race, class, sexuality, and age, have often come to remain underdeveloped within scholarship on male bodybuilders. Although there have been some studies which explicitly focussed on, for example, race (Sparkes, Batey, & Brown, 2005; Sparkes, Batey, & Owen, 2012); the overwhelming analytical preoccupation with sex/gender, generally, and masculinity, in particular, has often come to render somewhat unipolar analyses of male bodybuilders, their muscle, and the muscle-building practices, which fail to fully consider how the gendering of their bodies is also influenced by other aspects of subjectivity and embodiment, such as, race, age, and sexuality, as well as other systems of power, privilege, and discrimination within the bodybuilding community, such as, racism, ageism, and homophobia.

With the assistance of South African bodybuilders, this study has helped to bring to light how the gender(ed)-building of competitive male bodybuilders' muscle is, at the same time, racialised and racialising. Here, the subcultural discourses which circumscribe a bodybuilder's understanding of the aesthetic appearance and physiological corporeality of their body co-implicate sex/gender and ethnicity/race, together. In doing so, the muscle-building practices which are pursued by male bodybuilders interpolate contextually situated and historically peculiar gendered and racialised discourses through/with/across the ways in which their bodies become materially (re)built for the competitive stage.

With that said, future research must continue to broaden and deepen the multi-dimensionality of male bodybuilders' subjectivities and their peculiar forms of embodiment. This is particularly important given the ways competitive bodybuilding continues to diversify into new competitive categories which, on one hand, pluralise the material↔semiotic statuses and practices of building muscle in men's bodybuilding, such as, in the new bodybuilding divisions of "men's athletic physique" (BBSA, 2019a), "muscular men's physique" (BBSA, 2019b), "men's classic physique" (BBSA, 2019c), and "men's fitness" (BBSA, 2019d), and,

on the other hand, open men's competitive bodybuilding to new kinds of male bodybuilders, such as, young boys (BBSA, 2019e) and men with disabilities (BBSA, 2019f). These developments are transforming the peculiar gender(ed/ing) politics and power relations of building muscle for men in this community and, in so doing, are introducing new hierarchies and contestations for subcultural dominance and commercial exploitation.

In recommending this as a future direction for research, it is important to caution that evermore intersectional(ist/ised) analyses of bodybuilders and their muscular development do not disappear down a humanocentric rabbit hole, but, rather, continue to engage what Rowe (2013) refers to as a “posthumanist intersectionality” (p. 91). According to Thompson (2016), both the concept of intersectionality as well as its more common use within social scientific research has typically tended to reinforce the idea of human subjectivity and, therefore, human “difference as predominantly social” (p. 1287), that is, as (re)constructed through the discursive repertoires, practices, and relations of humans. However, what the trans-corporeal analytic of this study has shown is that human subjectivity is not only tightly intertwined with the sensual materialities of the human body, but, at the same time, deeply embedded in material relations with the more-than-human world.

In this regard, future research in bodybuilding should be wary not to (re)constrict the analytical lens of intersectionality to humans or human activity alone, but, rather, explore how the material, discursive, and affective agencies of bodybuilders' bodies and their more-than-human world(s) intra-act in co-producing more-than-gender, that is, gender *with* race, *with* dis/ability, *with* sexuality, *with* class, and *with* age, through/with/across the mountains of food they consume, the steroids they use, and the gym equipment they train with.

7.4.2. For critical studies of South African men and masculinity/ies: Empirically (re)building the bodies of South African men.

The critical study of South African men and masculinity/ies, at least in ways which are anti-discriminatory and non-reductive, only traces back to the recent collapse of apartheid, in the early 1990s¹⁹⁶ (Morrell, Jewkes, & Lindegger, 2012). With the fall of apartheid came the end (at least in law) of an “unquestionably patriarchal system” (Reid & Walker, 2005, p. 1) and, with this, the emergence of a new state of gender relations (again, at least in law) where the traditional identities and power of South African men entered a “state of flux, reconfiguration and change” (Reid & Walker, 2005, p. 2) prompted by the introduction of democratic constitutionalism, the economic empowerment of women, and gay rights. It was, in this context, that some scholars argued that South African men had been thrown into a state of so-called “crisis” (Walker, 2005) – resulting in the reactionary development of localised patterns of masculinity which reasserted South African male/men’s power and dominance through especially retrogressive forms of misogyny and (sexual) violence (Lemon, 1995).

Indeed, in the years that have since followed the collapse of apartheid, the study of South African men and masculinity/ies has, for the most part, been motivated (and funded) by an urgent need to address the competing demands of: (1) high rates of rape as well as sexual and domestic violence committed by South African men against women and children (Gqola, 2015); (2) mortality rates for South African men which are far greater than international averages and often attributable to problematic forms of masculine behaviour (Ratele, 2008); and (3) the rampant spread of HIV and AIDS infections in South Africa by men engaged in unprotected sex (Shisana et al., 2009). In this regard, it is evident South African men’s bodies continue to be at the heart of much of the violence that has marked the (colonial and

¹⁹⁶ This is not to say that there was no critically oriented scholarship on men during the apartheid years. Bozzoli’s (1983) paper, *Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies*, was one of the first to suggest that apartheid South Africa was marked by multiple patriarchies “each connected with a particular [racialised and classed] society” (p. 149).

apartheid) past and (democratic) present of South Africa's social and, in particular, gender relations. Yet, despite this, it has often been the case that the bodies of South African men have been displaced as a site of analytical attention in favour of more disembodied accounts of how South African men rhetorically construct their masculinity/ies – in effect, I would contend, evacuating the matter/material/materiality of South African's men's bodies as a site for critical development.

Perhaps it is understandable that such a blind spot exists within critical studies of South Africa men and masculinity/ies. For most of South Africa's history, South African men have themselves been victims to (and perpetrators of) violent forms of masculinity (Morrell, 1998; Potgieter, Eslen-Ziya, & Shefer, 2017; Ratele, 2016), at the center of which their bodies and, in particular, the bodies of Black, Coloured and Indian South African men, have been marked by the material and symbolic violences of colonialism and apartheid (Butchart, 1997, 1998; Ratele, 1998). In other words, as anti-and-de-colonial thinkers like Fanon (1986), Biko (1996), and Mbembe (2017) have already highlighted: the materiality of South African bodies and especially Black South African bodies are sites of significant politicisation, trauma, and pain – they are bodies which are not always easily (re)turned to. With that said, there have been some attempts to directly tackle the bodies and bodily practices of South African men (Dewing & Foster, 2007; Mankayi, 2008; Martin & Govender, 2011, 2013); although this has often resulted in South African men's bodies being rendered nothing more than a “discursive terrain” (Ratele, 1998, p. 62) for the construction and practice of masculinity/ies.

It is, in this regard, that this study marks one of the first attempts to concertededly take up the materiality/ies and, moreover, material agencies, of South African men's bodies. With that said, I must acknowledge that competitive male bodybuilders are a peculiar and exceptionally small community of South African men with unique styles of life, subcultural

values, and bodily practices, especially when it comes to muscular development. Thus, while this study may attempt to use the muscle of South African competitive male bodybuilders to begin carving a new critical territory into the long-overlooked flesh of South African men, much more work is still needed, particularly in studying South African men's bodies in the everyday and more mundane practices of gender and masculinity/ies.

To this effect, I would recommend that future research drill deeper into the bodies of South Africa men, but not just in ways which ultimately render their bodies a mere "vehicle for the inscription of masculinity" (Govender, 2006, p. 55). One of the ways in which this can be done is to explore how South African men's bodies are employed in bodily practices of violence, especially violence against women, children, and Other(ed) men. Studies which critically explore how the materiality of men's bodies are directly implicated in, for example, the daily habitual misogynies which characterise South African gender relations, carries with it important (pro)feminist implications for the ongoing research, education and activism which needs to be done in more effectively undoing the ways in which the pernicious alliance between patriarchy and violence have become ingrained into the matter/material/materiality of South African men's bodies.

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APPENDIX A: DIVISIONS AVAILABLE FOR MALE AND FEMALE COMPETITORS, INCLUDING BODYBUILDERS, IN BBSA*

Women's Divisions**	
IFBB SA division.	Primary judging criteria.***
Body fitness.	In body fitness, the emphasis is placed on aesthetics: beauty combined with an athletic physique. The physique will be assessed on the overall level of muscle tone, achieved through athletic, sporting or training endeavours. Muscle groups should have a round and firm appearance with a very small amount of body fat. The physique should neither be excessively muscular (have thicker muscle groups as in women's bodybuilding) and should be free of deep muscle separation and/or excessive muscle striations. The judges will assess the overall athletic appearance of the physique. Athletes should be very feminine on stage and not carry out any bodybuilding stances.
Women's fitness.	Judges are reminded that the competitor's posture and bearing, at all times while onstage is to be considered. The overall image displayed should demonstrate poise, grace and self-confidence. This is especially true at all times when the competitor is standing relaxed during the comparisons of the quarter turns. When standing relaxed, the competitors shall be warned against adopting a tense pose. Hair and facial beauty will be assessed and the presentation of a well-balanced, symmetrically developed physique. Athletes should not have the same type of muscularity, vascularity, muscular definition and/or the dieted leanness displayed by the female bodybuilder. However, her body tone must be good with a little amount of body fat. This athlete will display a more refined muscle as opposed to a female bodybuilder. Her physique will have longer leaner slender muscles.
Beach bikini.	This division is for the athlete who has a "beach body". The athlete keeps her body in shape by keeping fit and eating healthy. Muscular definition is not allowed, but body tone, soft physique, "a bit of curviness" and a healthy overall physical appearance is essential. Judges will be scoring competitors on the following items: balance and shape; overall physical appearance; symmetry; conditioning without the excessive defined muscle groups or separation of muscle or striations; low body fat – but softer lines; complexion; skin tone; poise and grace; hair and make-up; confidence; femininity; personality; and overall presentation.
Fitness bikini.	The IFBB SA has established the need for a division for athletes that do not completely meet the criteria for beach bikini. Fitness bikini falls between beach bikini (whose athletes display much softer lines and even the acceptable bit of curviness) and body fitness (whose athletes display more definition and definite level of muscle tone and conditioned physique with lower body fat). Judges will be scoring competitors on the following items: balance and shape; overall physical appearance; symmetry; conditioning without the excessive defined muscle groups or separation of muscle or

	striations; low body fat – firmer lines; complexion; skin tone; poise and grace; hair and make-up; confidence; femininity; personality; and overall presentation.
Figure fitness.	This division has been implemented in IFBB SA and only occurs at a regional, provincial, and national level. It is not recognised at any international championships. It was introduced by IFBB SA to cater for those female athletes who appear to fall between the physique requirements of a novice fitness athlete and advanced fitness athlete. Overall muscle tone with shapely lines, overall firmness and a relative degree of leanness of the physique, make up the ideal physique.
Ladies physique.	This division was created for the female athlete that no longer fit the criteria for a body fitness athlete or women's figure but has yet to meet the criteria for women's bodybuilding. This athlete is typically leaner, more compact, harder, and has developed muscle in excess of what is valued in the body fitness and figure divisions. Should excessive muscularity, akin to that of women bodybuilders, the athlete is scored down or penalised. However, the ladies physique athlete still presents herself very much like the body fitness or figure athlete showing grace, poise, confidence, beauty, and femininity. The judges will, like in women's bodybuilding, look for muscular femininity. This includes proportion, definition, symmetry, conditioning, balance, muscle striations, effectiveness of tan, presentation, and confidence. However this athlete may not compromise femininity in the presentation or development of her physique.
Women's bodybuilding.	The judges evaluate athletes on the basis of muscular femininity. This includes elements of proportion, definition, symmetry, conditioning, balance, muscle striations, effectiveness of tan, presentation, and confidence.
Routine with props: Women.	The only women's division which allows the athlete to perform a routine with props. The judges assessment is based purely on the overall routine performance, including, choice of music; choice of theme; choice of dress; gymnastic moves gymnastic combinations acrobatic moves; elements of strength; elements of flexibility; elements of any form of dance bodybuilding poses movement; any sporting sequences; flow of routine with music; showmanship; choreography; confidence; general body shape; overall "fitness look" of the athlete; posture; poise and grace; make up and accessories; balance; healthy skin tone; overall presentation; was the routine a crowd pleaser and was it entertaining; and speed or tempo of routine.
Children's division: Girls.	Open to girl-children under the age of 15 years. The judges will score the individual athlete based on their: general body shape – taking into account the age group of the children; overall "fitness look" of the athlete; confidence; poise and grace; posture; balance; and healthy skin tone.

Men's Divisions

Wheelchair.	Open to disabled athletes who are wheelchair bound. Judges assess the overall male athletic appearance and physique. Begin with the head and move down to the feet - take into consideration the hair, face, features and skin etc. Presentation of balance and a symmetrically developed upper body physique. The athlete's ability to present himself with confidence. Judges look at the primary muscle groups being displayed, and consider Look at the muscle shape, density and definition whilst keeping in mind the importance of an athletic balanced development. The muscle groups should have a round and
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firm appearance with a small amount of body fat. Assessment includes: proportion; definition; symmetry; conditioning; balance; striations; effectiveness of tan; presentation; confidence; wide shoulders and narrow hip taper; good shoulder development – arms not overpowering the shoulder caps and vice versa resulting in symmetry; lat connection should be low into the waist; and overall depth of muscle.

Men's fitness. The physique of a male fitness athlete is assessed on the overall level of muscle tone achieved through athletic endeavours. The muscle groups should have a round and firm appearance with a small amount of body fat. The physique should neither be excessively muscular nor excessively lean. The judges assess the overall male athletic appearance of the physique. This assessment takes into consideration the hair, facial features, overall athletic development, condition of skin and skin tone, and the athletes overall ability to present himself with confidence.

Athletic physique. The men's athletic physique category is aimed at male athletes who prefer to develop a less muscular, yet athletic and aesthetically pleasing physique. There are two primary criteria. First, muscularity and body condition. The judge assesses the overall male athletic appearance of the physique. Extreme muscularity is marked down. Judges look for fit contestants who display proper shape and symmetry combined with muscularity and overall condition. Second, stage presence and personality. Judges look for the contestant with the best stage presence and poise, who can successfully convey his personality to the audience and the athlete's ability to present himself onstage with confidence.

Men's classic bodybuilding. Classic bodybuilding caters for those male bodybuilders who prefer to develop a less muscular, yet athletic and aesthetically pleasing physique. The athlete should present himself in a healthy, fit, athletic looking muscular physique, in an attractively presented total package. Judges assess the overall male athletic appearance and physique. Presentation of balance and a symmetrically developed physique is essential, as well as the athlete's ability to present himself with confidence. Judges should look at the primary muscle groups being displayed. Look at the muscle shape, density and definition whilst keeping in mind the importance of an athletic balanced development. The muscle groups should have a round and firm appearance with a small amount of body fat. The physiques of classic bodybuilders' can often be described as ripped, shredded, hard, and vascular. The emphasis, therefore, for this athlete is presenting a physique which is symmetrical, well proportioned, and carries muscular detail in excess of the physique athlete; but does not develop muscularity as massive or bulky as athletes in men's bodybuilding. Unlike the other men's divisions, classic bodybuilders perform the same posing routines as male bodybuilders on stage, including, the compulsory poses, barring the most muscular.

Men's bodybuilding. The judges assess a male bodybuilders physique against: proportion; definition; symmetry; conditioning; balance; striations; effectiveness of tan; presentation; confidence; wide shoulders and narrow hip taper; the upper body and the lower body should be in proportional; balance; good shoulder development – arms not overpowering the shoulder caps and vice versa resulting in symmetry; lat connection should be low into the waist; there should be good thigh sweep with strong development around the knee area; calves should be full and long – balancing with the thigh; and overall depth of

muscle. The judges penalise athletes for: under-developed muscularity; domination by muscle groups; ill-proportioned muscles; smooth appearance; uneven tan or no tan or streaking tan; the lack of definition; and lean looking athlete. Like the classic bodybuilder, male bodybuilders require a great deal of muscular definition in their physique but, unlike the classic bodybuilder, develop the mass and density of their muscles to a greater degree.

Routine with
props: Men.

The only men's division which allows the athlete to perform a routine with props. The judges assessment is based purely on the overall routine performance, including, choice of music; choice of theme; choice of dress; gymnastic moves gymnastic combinations acrobatic moves; elements of strength; elements of flexibility; elements of any form of dance bodybuilding poses movement; any sporting sequences; flow of routine with music; showmanship; choreography; confidence; general body shape; overall "fitness look" of the athlete; posture; poise and grace; make up and accessories; balance; healthy skin tone; overall presentation; was the routine a crowd pleaser and was it entertaining; and speed or tempo of routine.

Children's
division: Boys.

Open to boy-children under the age of 15 years. The judges will score the individual athlete based on their: general body shape – taking into account the age group of the children; overall "fitness look" of the athlete; confidence; poise and grace; posture; balance; and healthy skin tone.

*The BBSA competitive divisions detailed here are at the time of conducting this research and writing this thesis. Further information, which may include changes instituted since submitting this thesis, can be retrieved from the BBSA website: <http://www.ifbbsa.co.za/criteria.html>

**The split between women's and men's divisions here is to indicate how the different divisions are strictly circumscribed by gender and sex.

***The primary judging criteria described here specifically apply to the evaluation of athletes' physiques and muscularity, for their respective divisions. Each division is comprised of different rounds of posing, performance, or modelling, each of which will carry different adjudicative emphases for the panel of judges. These nuances are not detailed here. The basic detail described here is to give the non-initiated reader a simple conceptual understanding of how the different divisions appear to value different forms of muscularity, even if these differences appear incredibly vague. For each division there are also judging criteria concerning competitive attire, posing, performances, and line-ups, which vary greatly. It should be noted, as it will appear here, that it is commonplace for the judging criteria for physiques and muscularity to be inter-mixed with other rules regulating a division. This is because the official literature of BBSA does not appear to adopt any consistent or clear formatting of their documents. In some instances, the documents appear to be formatted haphazardly. Each description is based on vocabulary from the applicable divisions' manuals. These can be viewed from the BBSA website: <http://www.ifbbsa.co.za/criteria.html>

APPENDIX B: WEIGHT-CLASS/CATEGORIES FOR COMPETITIVE MALE

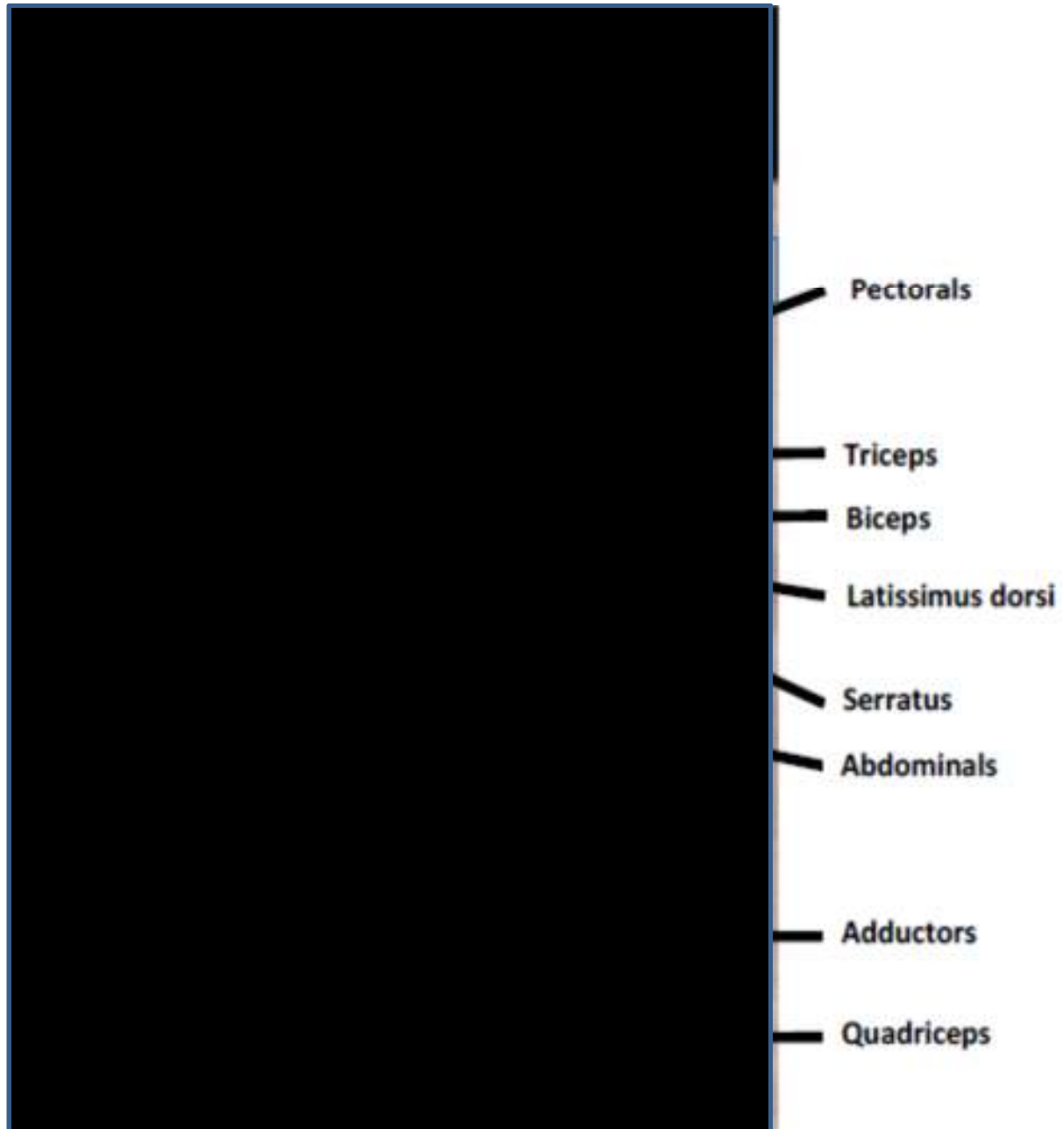
BODYBUILDERS IN BBSA*

Junior Men		
Class name.	Age group.	Number of line-ups or weight-class.
Teenage bodybuilding.	Under 16 years of age.	One line-up.
Juniors bodybuilding.	Under 18 years of age.	One line-up.
Juniors bodybuilding.	Under 23 years of age.	Two line-ups: Under 75kg and over 75kg.
Senior Men		
Class name.	Age group.	Number of line-ups or weight-class.
Flyweight.	No specified age limit.	Up to and including 60kg.
Bantamweight.	No specified age limit.	Up to and including 65kg.
Lightweight.	No specified age limit.	Up to and including 70kg.
Welterweight.	No specified age limit.	Up to and including 75kg.
Light Middleweight.	No specified age limit.	Up to and including 80kg.
Middleweight.	No specified age limit.	Up to and including 85kg.
Light Heavyweight.	No specified age limit.	Up to and including 90kg.
Heavyweight.	No specified age limit.	Up to and including 100kg.
Super Heavyweight.	No specified age limit.	Over 100kg.
Masters Men		
Class name.	Age group.	Number of-line ups or weight-class.
Masters.	Between the age of: 40-49.	Four line-ups: Under 70kg; up to 80kg; up to 90kg; and over 90kg
Masters.	Between the age of: 50-59.	Two line-ups: Under 80kg and over 80kg.
Masters.	Age 60 and over.	One line-up.
Classic Bodybuilding		
Class name.	BBSA Formula for calculating weight category.	
Up to and including 168cm (in body height).	Maximum weight (in kg) = height (in cm) – 100 (+0kg allowance).	
Up to and including 171cm.	Maximum weight (in kg) = height (in cm) – 100 (+2kg allowance).	
Up to and including 175cm.	Maximum weight (in kg) = height (in cm) – 100 (+4kg allowance).	
Up to and including 180cm.	Maximum weight (in kg) = height (in cm) – 100 (+6kg allowance).	
Over 180cm.	Maximum weight (in kg) = height (in cm) – 100 (+8kg).	

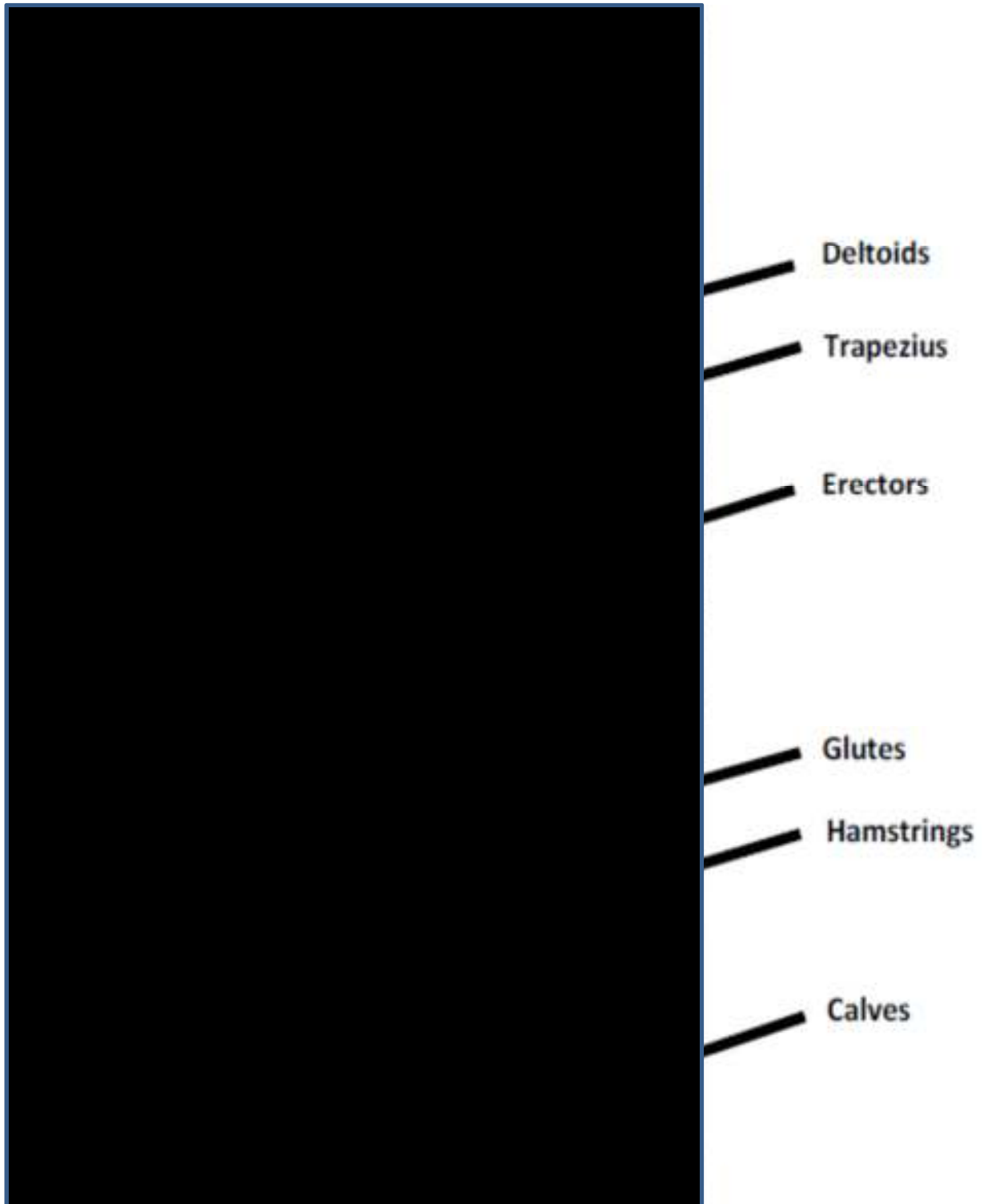
*The weight-classes and categories stipulated here are at the time of conducting this research and writing this thesis. Further information, which may include changes instituted since submitting this thesis, can be retrieved from the BBSA website:

<http://www.ifbbsa.co.za/criteria.html>

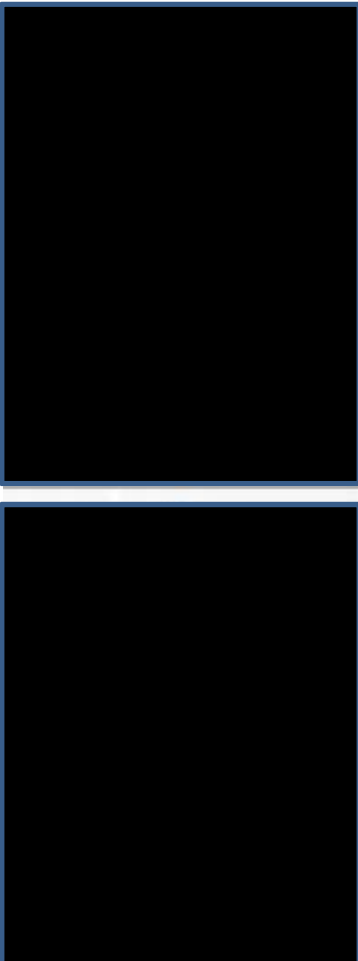
**APPENDIX C: BASIC DIAGRAM OF MAJOR MUSCLE GROUPS: FRONT-
FACING VIEW**



**APPENDIX D: BASIC DIAGRAM OF MAJOR MUSCLE GROUPS: BACK-FACING
VIEW**



APPENDIX E: COMPULSORY POSES FOR COMPETITIVE MALE BODYBUILDERS IN BBSA*

No.	Compulsory pose.	Brief description.**	Basic illustration.
1.	Front double bicep.	<p>Standing face front to the judges, with the legs and feet in-line and a short distance apart, the competitor will raise both arms to shoulder level and bend them at the elbows. The hands should be clenched and turned down so as to cause a contraction of the biceps and forearm muscles, which are the main muscle groups that are to be assessed in this pose. In addition, the competitor should attempt to contract as many other muscles as possible as the judges will be surveying the whole physique, from head to toe.</p> <p><u>What the judges are looking for:</u> The judge will first survey the biceps muscles looking for a full, peaked development of the muscle, noting whether or not there is a defined split between the anterior and posterior sections of the biceps, and will continue the head-to-toe survey by observing the development of the forearms, deltoids, pectorals, pec-delt tie-ins, abdominals, thighs, and calves. The judge will also look for muscle density, definition, and overall balance.</p>	
2.	Front lat spread.	<p>Standing face front to the judges, with the legs and feet a short distance apart, the competitor will place the open hands, or clenched fists, against, or gripping, the lower waist or obliques and will expand the latissimus muscles. At the same time, the competitor should attempt to contract as many other frontal muscles as possible. It shall be strictly forbidden for the competitor to pull up on the posing trunks so as to show the top inside of the quadriceps.</p> <p><u>What the judges are looking for:</u> The judge should first see whether the competitor can show a good spread of the latissimus muscles, thereby creating a V-shaped torso. Then the judge should continue with the head-to-foot survey, noting first the general aspects of the physique and then concentrating on the more detailed aspects of the various muscle groups.</p>	

3. Side tricep. The competitor may choose either side for this pose so as to show the “better” arm. He will stand with his left or right side towards the judges and will place both arms behind his back, either linking his fingers or grasping the front arm by the wrist with his rear hand. The leg nearest the judges will be bent at the knee and the foot will rest flat on the floor. The competitor will exert pressure against his front arm, thereby causing the triceps muscle to contract. He will also raise the chest and contract the abdominal muscles as well as the thigh and calf muscles.

What the judges are looking for:

The judge will first survey the triceps muscles, and conclude with the head-to-foot examination. In this pose, the judge will be able to survey the thigh and calf muscles in profile, which will help in grading their comparative development more accurately.

4. Displaying the best calf and rear double bicep. Standing with his back to the judges, the competitor will bend the arms and wrists as in the Front Double Biceps pose, and will place one foot back, resting on the toes. He will then contract the arm muscles as well as the muscles of the shoulders, upper and lower back, thigh and calf muscles.

What the judges are looking for:

The judge will first survey the arm muscles and then do the head-to-foot survey, during which there are more muscle groups to look at than in all of the other poses. This includes the neck, deltoids, biceps, triceps, forearm, trapezius, teres, infraspinatus, erector spinae, external obliques, latissimus dorsi, gluteus, thigh biceps, and calves. This pose, probably more than the others, will help the judge to determine the quality of the competitor’s muscle density, definition, and overall balance.



5. Displaying the best calf and rear lat spread.
- Standing with his back to the judges, the competitor will place his hands on his waist with his elbows kept wide, one foot back and resting on the toes. He will then contract the latissimus dorsi as wide as possible and display a calf contraction by pressing downward on the rear toes. The competitor should make an effort to display the opposite calf to that which was displayed during the back double biceps pose so the judge may assess both calf muscles equally. It shall be strictly forbidden for the competitor to pull up on the posing trunks so as to show the gluteus maximus muscles.

What the judges are looking for:

The judge will look for a good spread of the latissimus dorsi, but also for good muscle density and will again conclude with the head-to-foot survey.

6. Side chest.
- The competitor may choose either side for this pose, in order to display the “better” arm. He will stand with his left or right side towards the judges and will bend the arm nearest the judges to a right-angle position, with the fist clenched and, with the other hand, will grasp the wrist. The leg nearest the judges will be bent at the knee and will rest on the toes. The competitor will then expand the chest and by upward pressure of the front bent arm and contract the biceps as much as possible. He will also contract the thigh muscles, in particular, the biceps femoris group, and by downward pressure on his toes, will display the contracted calf muscles.

What the judges are looking for:

The judge will pay particular attention to the pectoral muscles and the arch of the rib cage, the biceps, the leg biceps and the calves, and will conclude with the head-to foot examination. In this pose the judge will be able to survey the thigh and calf muscles in profile, which will help in grading their comparative development more accurately.



7. Abdominals and thigh. Standing face front to the judges, the competitor will place both arms behind the head and will place one leg forward. He will then contract the abdominal muscles by “crunching” the trunk slightly forward. At the same time, he will contract the thigh muscles of the forward leg.

What the judges are looking for:

The judge will survey the abdominal and thigh muscles, and then conclude with the head-to-foot examination.



*The weight classes and categories stipulated here are at the time of conducting this research and writing this thesis. Further information, which may include changes instituted since submitting this thesis, can be retrieved from the BBSA website: <http://www.ifbbsa.co.za/criteria.html>

**Extracts from *BBSA/IFBBSA criteria: Men's bodybuilding* (BBSA, 2018b).

APPENDIX F: GLOSSARY OF PERFORMANCE-ENHANCING SUBSTANCES

Performance-enhancer.*	Administered.	Common reason(s) for use by competitive bodybuilders.**
Anapolon (Oxymetholone) aka Napolon.	Oral androgenic.	- Enhances gains in muscle mass.
Anavar (Oxandrolone).	Oral anabolic.	- Subcutaneous fat burning. - Lean-muscle development. - Conditioning in cutting cycles. - Mild strength gains. - Increased capacity for muscle recovery. - Speed-up metabolic rate.
Arimidex (Anastrozole).	Oral non-steroid agent.	- Aromatase inhibitor.
Clenbuterol (Clenbuterol hydrochloride) aka Clen.	Oral non-steroid agent.	- Subcutaneous fat burning.
Deca Durabolin (nandrolone decanoate) aka Deca.	Injectable anabolic.	- Slow, but longer-term gains in muscle mass.
Dianabol (Methandrostenolone) aka D-bol.	Oral androgenic.	- Used for superior gains in muscle mass, overall muscle strength, and muscle recovery.
Ephedrine (Ephedrine hydrochloride).	Oral non-steroid agent.	- Subcutaneous fat burning. - Anti-catabolic agent. - Stimulant and training enhancer.
Equipoise (Boldenone undecylenate).	Injectable anabolic. (Veterinary steroid).	- Aids in muscle recovery. - Delays muscle fatigue. - Enhances muscle mass. - Enhances strength of tendons and ligaments.
Halotestin	Oral androgenic.	- Promote overall strength gains.

(Fluoxymesterone) aka Halo.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lean-muscle development. - Muscle density enhancer.
Human Growth Hormone (Somatotropin) aka HGH.	Injectable non-steroid agent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General muscle growth and fat loss. - Most likely to be stacked with other steroids to maximise potency. - One of the most expensive performance-enhancers.
Insulin.	Injectable non-steroid agent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhances protein synthesis. - Most likely to be stacked with other steroids to maximise potency.
Lasix (Furosemide).	Diuretic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Water-draining effect (would be used to drain subcutaneous water retention to produce a hard, dry, and grainy look; and excrete excess water prior to the weigh-in).
Masteron (Drostanolone).	Injectable anabolic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lean-muscle development. - Conditioning, specifically, hardness, dryness and definition. - Anti-aromatase effects.
Nolvadex (Tamoxifen citrate).	Oral non-steroid agent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Selective oestrogen receptor modulator (combats the development of gynecomastia).
Proviron (Mesterolone).	Oral anabolic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Subcutaneous fat-burning. - Synergistic properties. - Anti-oestrogenic effects (prevents testosterone conversion into oestrogen). - Increases the amount of free testosterone in the body.
Synthol.	Injectable non-steroid agent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increases muscle volume.
Virormone (Testosterone propionate) aka Test pro.	Injectable androgenic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Superior increases in muscle mass. - Promotes Nitrogen retention.
Winstrol (Stanazolol) aka Winny.	Oral anabolic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Superior conditioning for cutting cycles.

*The performance-enhancing substances listed here are those mentioned in this thesis. Nor was it the case that all participants opted to use or admitted to the use of performance-enhancing substances.

**The reasons stated here for using a particular performance-enhancer should not be considered exhaustive or universal. Reasons were often highly variable and dictated by personal experience and experimentation, as well as the effects of multi-drug combinations.

APPENDIX G: THE BODYBUILDERS

Name*	Age**	'Race'***	Comment****
Pule	26	Black	Pule has been involved in bodybuilding for 3 years: which is the same amount of time he has also been participating competitively. Pule found his way into bodybuilding because he believed it would enhance his fitness and physical wellbeing - which are important for him given his work as a fire-fighter. He has yet to experiment with performance enhancing substances and steroids but is considering doing so after having been unable to achieve at a national level. Pule's competitive weight is 73kg.
Thabo	31	Black	Thabo has been competing in bodybuilding for the past 3 years. He has ranked high at both provincial and national provincial competitions. Thabo's transition into bodybuilding was reportedly seamless after already spending 8 years in the gym as a physical fitness instructor in the South African military. His off-season weight is 83kg from which he shaves down to 69kg for competitions.
Abey	38	Black	Abey has been in the gym for about 8 years. After being told by a bodybuilder that he had 'good genetic potential' 4 years ago he began to enter competitions. Off-season Abey weighs about 86kg and when competing he weighs in at about 77kg.
Kevin	30	White	Kevin has an off-season weight of 115kg and competition weight of 107kg. Although Kevin has achieved success at a number of regional, provincial, and national tournaments his inability to secure long-term and substantial financial sponsorship have resulted in him being unable to pursue his goals of competing internationally.
Max	18	White	"I was tired of being the skinny kid", was, according to Max, his reason for picking up bodybuilding roughly 12 months ago. He is a novice bodybuilder training towards his very first competition with a goal weight of 89kg. Fresh out of high school Max is still living with his parents and working in catering. Max is enthusiastic about pursuing a career in bodybuilding and is prepared to risk experimenting with performance enhancers to achieve his competitive goals.
James	39	White	James has been competing in bodybuilding for 20 years. Over the course of his

			competitive career he has achieved significantly high rankings and awards at international tournaments, in particular during his time as a classic bodybuilder. Being self-employed allows James to commit many hours a day to the nutritional, mental and training demands that his continued achievements require of him. His competitive weight is around 79kg.
Robbie	42	White	With a competitive weight which varies between 85-90kg, Robbie typically competes within the masters categories; in which he has achieved success at a national level. Off-season he tries to maintain a weight of 95kg.
Tebogo	30	Black	Tebogo has been identified by most of the local bodybuilding magazines as one of the rising stars of competitive bodybuilding in South Africa. Having been competing for 10 years he has only recently been met with substantial sponsorship after securing significant rankings at national and international tournaments. He holds an off-season weight of 106kg and a competitive weight of 89kg. Recently, however, Tebogo has been strategically considering the need to further his career by moving into weight categories above 100kg.
Peter	47	White	Peter, at a competitive weight of 102kg, competes in the masters categories. Although having competed for about 8 years, and achieved at a provincial level, Peter has battled to make further improvements because of a severe muscle tear to his left bicep while in the gym. This has resulted in Peter being dogged by strength deficits and the perception of asymmetrical muscular development to his physique.
Chad	37	White	Chad was a rugby player for many years before taking an interest in bodybuilding. After entering regional and provincial competitions and achieving significant rankings he has gone on to win his competitive division on the national stage. Competing for 3 years so far Chad weighs in at 89kg with an off-season weight of around 100kg.
Jonathan	42	Indian	Jonathan has been competing in bodybuilding for about 23 years. Over Jonathan's lengthy career as a bodybuilder, and within the industry more broadly, he has been showcased in a number of local magazines. He has gone on to place high at international tournaments with a competitive weight of 75-80kg.
Frank	35	White	Frank's off-season weight typically varies between 95kg. Off-season he tries to maintain a competitive goal weight of 88kg.
Jacob	41	White	Jacob has been competing for the last 19 of the 23 years he has been bodybuilding.

			Off- season he carries a weight of approximately 110kg and reduces this to 97kg for competitions. He has achieved success at provincial, national, and international levels of bodybuilding. For Jacob, bodybuilding is not just a style of life but also an entrepreneurial enterprise as many of his business ventures centre on fitness, nutrition and supplementation, as well as bodybuilding training.
Pierre	35	White	Pierre is in the unique position, amongst my sample of coparticipants, of being both an athlete and serving in the administrative structures of bodybuilding in South Africa. He has been competing for the past 5 years, has an off-season weight of 84kg and a competitive weight of 77kg.
Maurice	25	White	Maurice has only been competing in bodybuilding for just over a year. He has an off-season weight of 102kg and a competitive weight between 85-90kg. Although Maurice works in the commercial world, he earns extra money on the side as a dancer/entertainer – of the exotic variety.
Neil	24	Coloured	Neil has been in the gym since his early adolescence. So far over his 10-year career he has already achieved international recognition in the junior divisions in which he competes. Currently his competitive weight is around 77kg. Recently Neil has had to postpone his participation in upcoming competitions because of his employment commitments. Neil has to hold down fulltime employment because he has been unable to secure substantial sponsorship to assist his training and nutritional requirements.
Bevan	22	Coloured	Bevan is a student at university who has been competing for the past 3 years. Although he has been struggling of late to balance the demands of university and competitive bodybuilding. Bevan has been a competitive bodybuilder in the junior divisions for 3 years and has a competitive weight of 80kg.
Kieran	24	Indian	Kieran's off-season weight is around 95kg. He drops this to 79kg when competing. Although having been training in the gym for the past 6 years he has only been bodybuilding competitively for the last 3 years.
Patrick	56	White	At the commencement of this study Patrick began his final year of competing in bodybuilding after having done so for 36 years. While Patrick had intended to retire because of the financial, emotional, and physical demands his competitive bodybuilding; he passed away during the course of his final year as result of complications linked to a liver-related illness. At the beginning of his final year of

			competing, Patrick's off-season weight was 107kg while his competitive weight was 100kg.
Reg	39	Black	Reg has been weight-training in the gym for about 9 years. For the first 7 of those years Reg identified himself as a bodybuilder but did not compete. Over the last 3 years he has started competing in an effort to, in his words, "become a real bodybuilder". His competitive season weight sits at 97kg.
Bert	40	White	Bert has been bodybuilding competitively bodybuilding for 7 years after having been bodybuilding noncompetitively for 20 years. According to him his reason for turning competitive was because: "if you're not on stage then you're not a bodybuilder". His competitive weight varies between 79-83kg.
Xander	28	Coloured	After lifting weights in the gym after 8 years Xander decided to start competing. Now having competed for the 3 years has achieved top placements in his weight-class nationally. Currently working in the nutrition advisory business Xander has a competitive weight of 75kg.
Jeff	29	White	Jeff is currently working towards achieving IFBB "pro" status. Although working within the fitness and nutrition industry as a consultant his ambition is to be a fulltime "pro" bodybuilder. Having established his success at all the major national tournaments in South Africa over the past 10 years Jeff has gone on to achieve on the international stage, most notably, the Mr Universe tournament. His competition weight is about 99kg.
Etienne	38	White	Etienne, much like Jeff, has also won a litany of competitive titles at a national level. He has achieved top rankings at the IFBB World Championships. Off-season he weighs in at roughly 100kg, with a competitive weight between 90-95kg.
Ricky	19	White	Ricky has been competing for just over 2 years. He was introduced to bodybuilding while spending many hours in the gym each day as part of his high school rugby training. After failing to secure a rugby scholarship to a local rugby academy he decided to pursue bodybuilding at a more competitive level. Although having spent the first year of his competitive bodybuilding steroid free, Ricky has now begun experimenting with ephedrine and diuretics to keep up with his competition. Ricky currently competes in the under-21 age group for classic bodybuilders and has a competitive weight of 79kg. He works as a waiter at night while spending most of his days in the gym.

Jack	36	White	Jack has recently been awarded his IFBB “pro” status. His off-season weight is about 135kg; while his competition weight is a staggering 118kg.
Kavir	34	Indian	Kavir has been competing for 2 years. He has been successful on the South African provincial competitive circuit, as well as having competed periodically in India. He has a weight of 94kg and will be moving permanently to India to pursue his competitive career full time.
Kuben	20	Indian	An undergraduate student studying law at university, Kuben has been bodybuilding for 4 years but has only decided to enter his first competition recently. Training towards his first competition at the time of his interview Kuben weighed in at about 90kg. His goal is to decrease this to a competitive weight of 85kg.
Sipho	26	Black	Sipho started bodybuilding 3 years ago when he was 23 years of age. Although he started competing with great enthusiasm this has now waned and his competitive participation has become increasingly sporadic. Sipho attributes this to the increasingly high cost of training, nutrition, steroid regimens, and competitive participation, in general. He has indicated that he will likely give up competing within the next few months. Sipho’s competitive weight is 84kg.
Ron	39	Black	Ron has been competing in bodybuilding for 10 years. He started weightlifting in the gym when he was at university 15 years ago. Ron’s competitive weight is 87kg. He is considered a mentor too many up-and-coming Black bodybuilders in South Africa.

*All names are pseudonyms.

**Age in years at the time of enrolment in the study.

***Self-identified by the bodybuilder.

****All weights (given in kilograms) and months or years spent competing in bodybuilding are at the time of their participation in this research.

APPENDIX H: ORIGINAL DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA FOR MUSCLE DYSMORPHIA

Listed below are the original diagnostic criteria proposed in Pope, Gruber, Choi, Olivardia, and Phillips (1997, p.556):

1. The person has a preoccupation with the idea that one's body is not sufficiently lean and muscular. Characteristic associated behaviours include long hours of lifting weights and excessive attention to diet.
2. The preoccupation causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning, as demonstrated by at least two of the following four criteria:
 - a. The individual frequently gives up important social, occupational, or recreational activities because of a compulsive need to maintain his or her workout and diet schedule;
 - b. The individual avoids situations where his or her body is exposed to others, or endures such situations only with marked distress or intense anxiety;
 - c. The preoccupation about the inadequacy of body size or musculature causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning;
 - d. The individual continues to work out, diet, or use ergogenic (performance-enhancing) substances despite knowledge of adverse physical or psychological consequences.
3. The primary focus of the preoccupation and behaviours is on being too small or inadequately muscular, as distinguished from fear of being fat, as in anorexia nervosa, or a primary preoccupation only with other aspects of appearance, as in other forms of body dysmorphic disorder.

APPENDIX I: RESEARCH INVITATION TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

Department of Psychology

Dear Sir,

Re: Doctoral Research Invitation: Men's Competitive Bodybuilding.

I am a Ph.D. student in the Psychology Department at the University of Cape Town. I am conducting doctoral research on men's competitive bodybuilding in South Africa. In sum, the focus of this research is to understand the significance of muscle for competitive male bodybuilders.

If you are willing to be part of this research, I will ask you to participate in the following:

- 1) I will supply you with a disposable camera for a period of two weeks to **take photographs** about your life in competitive bodybuilding.
- 2) I will ask you to **participate in an interview** with me. This individual interview will involve the photographs you would have taken. The interview will be roughly 60-90minutes in length. If a further follow up interview is required with you that will be discussed if necessary.

Exact times, dates, and venues for the interviews will be set pending your willingness to participate. Every effort will be made to ensure that your participation in this study is most convenient for you. The interviews will be audio-recorded but your participation is in an anonymous capacity and all biographical information will be kept confidential and used only for purposes of the above study. Your participation is voluntary and you will be free to withdraw at any time should you desire to.

You will have the opportunity to access an edited copy of my research findings that will be made available to you on completion of my research. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries regarding this study.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Jarred Martin (Researcher): email – [REDACTED] cell – [REDACTED]

Should you wish to verify this study please feel free to contact my doctoral supervisors:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Should you have any queries regarding the ethical status of this research project at any time you can contact the Ethics Chair in the Department of Psychology at UCT via:

[REDACTED]

APPENDIX J: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

Department of Psychology

Men's Competitive Bodybuilding – Study Consent Form.

1. Invitation and purpose

You are invited to take part in a research study about male competitive bodybuilders and the significance of muscle in competitive bodybuilding in South Africa. I am a Ph.D. student in the Department of Psychology at the University of Cape Town.

2. Procedures

Participation in this study is voluntary. You retain the right to withdraw at any time. If you decide to take part in the study you will be expected to do the following:

1. I will supply you with a disposable camera for a period of about two weeks and ask you to **take a small number of photographs** about aspects involved in developing your muscle for competitive bodybuilding.
2. After I have your photographs developed I will ask you to participate in **an individual interview** with me. This interview will involve your photographs and should take between 60-90 minutes. If a follow up interview is required with you this will be discussed at a later stage.

3. Inconveniences

Every effort will be made to conduct the interviews at dates, times, and venues which are most convenient for you and the researcher.

Although there is no expectation that you will become distressed or uncomfortable by the interviews you may stop participating at any time without any negative consequences. If you do become distressed arrangements will be made to refer you for counseling, if necessary.

4. Benefits

I hope that you will take the opportunity to share your views and experiences of competitive bodybuilding. Given the lack of research on bodybuilding in South Africa I hope that this study will contribute to an informed understanding of men in competitive bodybuilding.

5. Confidentiality and management of your information

All biographical information will be kept confidential and used only for this study.

All the interviews will be audio-recorded. These audio-recordings along with electronic copies of your photographs and interview transcripts will be stored on a password-protected computer. Once your photographs are developed they will be scanned electronically, and the hard copies destroyed.

During the research an electronic backup of the audio-recordings, photographs, and interview transcripts will be kept on CD in a locked file cabinet in a secure location.

On completion of the research all the data will be destroyed except for an electronic copy. This copy will be stored on a CD and archived in a secure location.

Should any of the findings from this study be considered for publishing in an academic journal at any point your biographical details and identifying particulars will be kept confidential.

6. Management of your photographs

Please circle the preferred option:

I agree	Do not agree	To have my photos used for discussion in the interviews , as long as my identity is protected.
I agree	Do not agree	To have my photos used for publication in the final thesis document, as long as my identity is protected.
I agree	Do not agree	To have my photos used for publication in articles and journal publications based on this research, as long as my identity is protected.

7. Money matters

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

8. Contact details

Any information or questions about the study or the researcher can be directed to the researcher and/or the academic supervisors in the Department of Psychology at the University of Cape Town:

Researcher: Jarred Martin – [REDACTED] (Tel.: [REDACTED])

Academic Supervisors:

A/Prof. Floretta Boonzaier – [REDACTED] (Tel.: [REDACTED])

Prof. Don Foster – [REDACTED] (Tel.: [REDACTED])

Should you have any queries regarding your rights as a participant during your participation, you can contact the Ethics Chair in the Department of Psychology via [REDACTED] (email: [REDACTED]) or call: [REDACTED].

9. Signatures: Consent to participate

I..... (full name) hereby volunteer to take part in the above mentioned study. I confirm that I have read the attached letter, understand the nature of the research study, and understand the conditions of participation in the study.

Signature (Participant):..... Date signed:.....

10. Signatures: Consent to being audio-recorded

I..... (full name) hereby volunteer to be audio-recorded as part of my willful participation in the above mentioned study. I confirm that I understand when this recording will take place, the method of recording being used (i.e. audio-recording), and that this recording will take place in an ethical manner which protects my rights to anonymity and confidentiality.

Signature (Participant):..... Date signed:.....

APPENDIX K: AUTOPHOTOGRAPHY LEAFLET

“Building muscle”

Instructions:

This activity involves you taking photos with the disposable camera I have provided you.

Over the next two weeks, I would like you take photos which show *how you build and develop your muscle(s) to compete in men’s bodybuilding*.

You can take as many photographs as you feel are necessary.

These photographs can be of anything, including you.

Important reminder:

Should you take any photographs that involve other people or in which other people may appear, please make sure you ask for their permission to be included in the photograph.

Tear off here and keep for easy reference.

**APPENDIX L: AUTOPHOTOGRAPHIC CONTRIBUTIONS OF EACH
BODYBUILDER TO THIS STUDY**

Name*	Number of autophotographs provided
Pule	10
Thabo	13
Abey	15
Kevin	16
Max	16
James	9
Robbie	10
Tebogo	14
Peter	12
Chad	18
Jonathan	4
Frank	20
Jacob	16
Pierre	9
Maurice	16
Neil	4
Bevan	7
Kieran	16
Patrick	22
Reg	12
Bert	10
Xander	15
Jeff	15
Etienne	16
Ricky	16
Jack	12
Kavir	16
Kuben	16
Sipho	13
Ron	16
Total	404

*All names are pseudonyms.

APPENDIX M: TRANSCRIPTION NOTATION

Notation	Function
...	Words omitted for conciseness
I am not concerned about my [competition] colour (in single square brackets)	Completion of a word or insertion of words for clarity
[[Gestures towards autophotograph]] (in double square brackets)	Notes about the movements, gesticulations, or gestures of the participant while speaking
<i>Slang words</i>	Slang words or phrases placed in italics
